

S THE SUNDAY TIMES

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He married his maid

“She was my first relationship,” says Wu Derong, whose Filipino wife is 10 years older. Read their story and that of other couples who went against romantic ideals in Life’s Valentine special

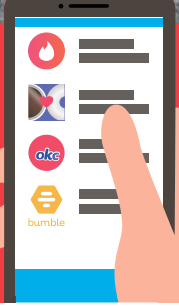


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Thai party obeys King’s order to keep sister out of politics

Thaksin-linked party also cancels campaign plans; former princess thanks her supporters

BANGKOK • A former Thai princess whose stunning announcement she was running for prime minister in the March 24 general election was quickly opposed by her brother, the King, thanked the people yesterday for their support but steered clear of commenting on her candidacy.

Hours after King Maha Vajiralongkorn prohibited his older sister Ubolratana Rajakanya from being the prime ministerial candidate of a party linked to ousted former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, Ms Ubolratana posted a message on her Instagram thanking supporters for their “love and kindness towards each other over the past day” and expressed gratitude for their support.

The 67-year-old – who relinquished her royal title in 1972 but continues to be treated as a royal – did not directly mention her brother or her political hopes but said she wanted to see Thailand to be “moving forward, being admirable and acceptable by international countries, want to see all Thais have rights, a chance, good living, happiness to all”. She ended her post with the hashtag #ILoveYou.

A political bombshell was dropped on Friday morning when

the Thai Raksa Chart Party – an offshoot of a larger pro-Thaksin party that was ousted from power in the 2014 coup – nominated Ms Ubolratana as its sole candidate for prime minister in the upcoming elections.

Social media immediately erupted with memes framing her candidacy as a fight between good and evil. The hashtag #LongLiveSlender – which referred to her preference for people to wish her “long live slender” (*song phra slender*) instead of “long live your highness” (*song phra charoen*) – began trending on Twitter.

But about 12 hours later, her political bid was stymied when the King issued a nationally televised royal command saying immediate members of the royal family traditionally must stay above politics.

Thai journalist Pravit Rojanaphruk tweeted: “One thing that cannot be changed by any royal announcement is we all know now where Princess #Ubolratana stands politically.”

In a statement yesterday, Thai Raksa Chart expressed gratitude to the former princess and said it “accepts His Majesty’s command with loyalty to the King and every single member of the royal family”.

The party also cancelled plans to launch election campaigns in Bangkok’s Chinatown earlier yesterday. It informed reporters without explanation that Thai Raksa Chart leader Preechapol Pongpanit and campaign chief Nattawut Saikaur would cancel the visit to Yaowarat.

Topping one of the most dramatic weeks in the nation’s political history, Thailand’s Election Com-

mission (EC) said it will meet tomorrow, without specifying the agenda.

But the leader of the pro-military People’s Reform Party has urged the EC to dissolve Thai Raksa Chart for nominating Ms Ubolratana, Bangkok Post reported. Mr Paitoon Nititawan said that under the 2018 Political Party Act, the EC must propose to the Constitution Court the dissolution of a political party that has committed an act deemed hostile to the rule of the constitutional monarchy.

While political watchers were gripped by the political twists and turns, the reactions were much more muted on the social media pages of the country’s three English newspapers – Bangkok Post, The Nation and Khaosod English.

For example, 15 hours after The Nation posted a link saying the King had issued a statement regarding his sister’s political bid, most of the commentators said it was a “very nice decision” and hailed the King for his wisdom. “I hope she will accept with (an) open heart that royals are not supposed to be in politics,” said Ms Vee Porter, while Mr Nhatz Loyaga said there must be “separation of monarchy from state politics”.

“It would never have worked out well anyway. Would the media or anyone dare to criticise her as PM, even the opposition for that matter? Common sense prevailed in the end,” said Mr Oscar Chico.

Some expressed unhappiness with Thai Raksa Chart. An activist who called himself Champ1984 said he was “disappointed” with the idea of a pro-democracy party enlisting a royal family member and would now vote for a different party.

Still, there were some who felt that Ms Ubolratana’s short-lived bid was to be admired. “Thank you for (being) daring and giving hope to the Thai people,” wrote Mr Yvan Rattana Vilain-Lueluang on Khaosod English’s Facebook page.

THE NATION/ASIA NEWS NETWORK, REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A6&7

Malaysia govt vessel, Greek carrier collide in Singapore waters

Tee Zhuo

A Malaysian government vessel and a Greek carrier collided in Singapore territorial waters off Tuas yesterday afternoon, the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) said.

The collision between Greece-registered bulk carrier Piraeus and Malaysian vessel Polaris happened at 2.28pm as the Piraeus was on its way from Singapore to its next port of call at Tanjung Pelepas in Johor.

“MPA is deeply concerned that the presence of unauthorised vessels in Singapore port limits can cause confusion for the international shipping community and threaten navigational safety in our waters,” the statement added.

An MPA spokesman said there were no reports of an oil leak. MPA is investigating the incident.

Polaris, a Malaysian Marine Department vessel, is one of the vessels that trespassed on Singapore waters off Tuas last year.

When contacted, the department’s director-general Baharin Abdul Hamid said the Polaris was anchored and the Piraeus was on its way when the vessels collided.



Greek carrier Piraeus was on its way to its next port of call when it collided with Malaysian vessel Polaris yesterday. PHOTO: SINGAPORE POLICE FORCE

Malaysia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs added that the vessels were in communication and Piraeus had responded that it would steer clear of Polaris. “Despite the clear communication and definitive instructions given, the collision happened... and both vessels were cleared of each other at 2.36pm.”

The ministry added that there were no injuries to the crew of both vessels and the Piraeus was instructed to sail to the Port of Tanjung Pelepas where it is moored now.

Piraeus and its crew have been detained by the Malaysian authorities for a preliminary inquiry.

This is the first reported collision since Malaysia unilaterally gazetted altered port limits on Oct 25 last year. The new limits

went beyond its past claims. In response, Singapore extended its port limits off Tuas to the full extent of its territorial waters.

Speaking in Parliament on Jan 14, Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said Singapore would do its best to discuss all outstanding bilateral issues with Malaysia in a calm, reasonable and focused manner.

He added that his discussions with his Malaysian counterpart have been “amicable and constructive, focused on trying to resolve the issues”.

Officials from both countries have been meeting to discuss both the maritime issue and a separate aviation dispute.

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Merdeka package will not burden a future govt: Chan

Addressing what he said were concerns from young people on how the Government will fund the Merdeka Generation Package, with some labelling it an “election gimmick”, Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing yesterday gave the assurance that funds will be set aside by this term of government.

He also made it clear that money for the multibillion-dollar scheme will not come from a future hike in the goods and services tax (GST).

Mr Chan said every term of government has to make sure it earns its keep, and in the first two to three years, it works very hard to carefully manage the Budget and grow the economy. “Because the rule in the Singapore system is that no government can make – or should make – empty promises on behalf of a future government,” he said in a speech at a Chinese New Year dinner for Tanjong Pagar GRC and Radin Mas SMC.

“If we decide to have the Merdeka Generation Package... then it is the responsibility of this term of government to harness its resources to put them into a fund, to make sure that this burden is not passed on to the next government or future governments.” Revenue from the two-point GST increase – to take place some time between 2021 and 2025 – is not funding the package, he added.

The Merdeka package, which will benefit Singaporeans born in the 1950s, along with some of those who did not qualify for the earlier Pioneer Generation Package given in 2014, will cover subsidies for outpatient care, Medisave top-ups, MediShield Life premium subsidies and payouts for long-term care. The details will be announced on Feb 18 during the Budget statement.



CURRENT GOVT’S RESPONSIBILITY

If we decide to have the Merdeka Generation Package... then it is the responsibility of this term of government to harness its resources to put them into a fund, to make sure that this burden is not passed on to the next government or future governments.



TRADE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER
CHAN CHUN SING

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Two die from dengue fever this year

Aw Cheng Wei

Two men have died from dengue fever so far this year, said the Health Ministry and the National Environment Agency (NEA).

The first victim is a 74-year-old man who lived in Bedok Reservoir. He died last Sunday. The second is a 77-year-old Hougang Avenue 3 resi-

dent who died last Thursday.

One of the deaths took place in an active dengue cluster in Bedok, which had 167 reported dengue cases as of last Friday.

The cluster comprises Bedok Reservoir Road, Jalan Damai, Jalan Tenaga and Kaki Bukit Avenue 1, where the NEA has been “conducting multiple rounds of inspections” since Nov 23.

In Hougang Avenue 3, six dengue cases had been reported as of last Friday. Two mosquito breeding habitats had been destroyed.

Last year, five people aged 41 to 75 years old died from dengue fever, according to data from the NEA website.

The NEA said it will be taking enforcement action against owners whose premises contain mosquito

breeding habitats.

Dengue continues to be a problem in Singapore, with 455 cases reported in the first two weeks of January, thrice as many compared with the same two-week period last year.

Last year, there were 3,285 reported cases of dengue, almost 20 per cent more than in 2017.

But there have been efforts to combat the dengue menace. In Nee

Soon East and Tampines West, the population of dengue-carrying mosquitoes has been cut by at least half after the release of sterile male mosquitoes, which leads to eggs that cannot hatch.

It is part of an NEA scheme called Project Wolbachia and it will be expanded to wider areas in the two estates.

The Wolbachia-Aedes mosquitoes’ job is to control and reduce the Aedes aegypti mosquito population, the primary species responsible for transmitting dengue and Zika. Eggs produced from the

union of a male Wolbachia-Aedes mosquito and the female Aedes mosquito will not hatch. This limits the mosquito larvae each female Aedes mosquito can produce.

The NEA reminds the public to play their part to help stem dengue transmission in affected areas, including by applying insect repellent and checking their premises daily for potential mosquito breeding habitats.

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SEE INSIGHT B10



Pacific Mansion

Sold for: \$980 million in 2018

Number of units: 288

Type: Freehold condo

Blockbuster year for selling en bloc last year

35 residential deals valued at over \$10b highest in over a decade

Grace Leong
Business Correspondent

En bloc sales notched a blockbuster performance last year with 35 residential deals valued at more than \$10 billion, the highest in more than a decade.

Together with 27 deals valued at \$8.13 billion in 2017 and three deals valued at \$1 billion in 2016, this en bloc cycle has achieved 65 deals worth \$19.1 billion so far, compared to the all-time record of \$21.8 billion in the 2005-2007 cycle, according to Colliers International’s data.

The top collective sale last year was Pacific Mansion, a freehold site in the upscale River Valley precinct, which was acquired for \$980 million by GuocoLand, Intrepid Investments and Hong Realty. It was the biggest collective sale in more than a decade, and the second-highest on record after the sale of Farrer Court for \$1.34 billion in 2007.

Tampines Court was sold for \$970 million and Amber Park for \$907 million.

Some observers believe the current cycle may continue, as it seems that sellers of some projects have not given up hope of selling en bloc despite the July 6 cooling measures.

After the measures kicked in, only one residential deal went through – the sale of the 32-unit Phoenix Heights for \$33.1 million.

Some projects have either relaunched their tenders at lower prices or at the same price. Some mega sites even raised their asking price to achieve 80 per cent consensus to launch a tender.

“It’s like those people who queue up to buy Toto,” said Savills Singapore research head Alan Cheong. “The agent still needs to get 80 per

cent to launch the tender, or all the expenditure on marketing and valuation would have gone to naught.”

But critics call this a pyrrhic victory as developers are expected to give mega sites a miss due to higher land acquisition costs after the cooling measures.

Ms Tricia Song, head of research for Colliers International, Singapore, expects developers to “remain cautious in land acquisition, in view of the ample supply pipeline from public land tenders and private collective sale sites accumulated before the curbs”.

“By the middle of this year, with the relatively healthy take-up since the July cooling measures, and assuming a benign economic outlook, developers could potentially be more active in land-banking again,” she said.

Facing a cooling market, owners of the 226-unit Spanish Village in Farrer Road are in the process of signing a supplementary agreement to lower the asking price to \$828 million from \$882 million. The tender, which will be their third try this round, closes on March 11.

A Pre-Application Feasibility Study (PAFS) was carried out by an appointed traffic consultant and an in-principle approval of up to 703 units has been obtained from the Land Transport Authority on Sept 6 last year, according to its marketing agent Edmund Tie & Company.

Mr Terence Lian, head of investment sales for Huttons Asia, said: “They may stand a good chance because they cleared the PAFS, which means the developer knows how many units they can build. Plus they reduced their asking price.”

But International Property Advisor chief executive Ku Swee Yong disagreed. “The developer will have to consider competition from the mixed-use GLS (government land sales) site in Holland Village and several en blocs that have completed, including Tulip Garden, and



FILE PHOTOS: ZAOBAO, ST

Tampines Court

Sold for: \$970 million in 2017

Number of units: 560

Type: Ex-HUDC estate

Amber Park

Sold for: \$906.7 million in 2017

Number of units: 200

Type: Freehold condo

IN TIME

By the middle of this year, with the relatively healthy take-up since the July cooling measures, and assuming a benign economic outlook, developers could potentially be more active in land-banking again.



MSTRICIA SONG, head of research for Colliers International, Singapore.

whether demand will be soaked up by the time the new project is launched for sale,” he said.

Already, a number of en bloc projects have closed tender without a bid in recent weeks. Leonie Gardens, which launched for a second time at the same reserve price of \$800 million, closed on Jan 22 without a bid. It was the same outcome on Jan 28 for Horizon Towers, which also launched for a second time at the same reserve price of \$1.1 billion.

Even a smaller site – Park View Mansions – closed tender without a bid despite lowering its reserve price to \$250 million from \$320 million.

Yet some mega sites have raised their asking price to get the 80 per cent mandate to launch a tender. Among them is Pine Grove, which

raised its price to \$1.86 billion from \$1.72 billion at the last minute, helping it secure the 80 per cent mandate.

Mandarin Gardens raised its asking price to \$2.79 billion from \$2.48 billion in November after owners discovered that the land parcel was undervalued. Signatures are at 64 per cent.

Braddell View, the biggest of 18 former HUDC estates, has reached the 80 per cent mandate at the reserve price of \$2.08 billion.

But JLL regional director Tan Hong Boon said: “Many developers aren’t looking at the big sites now. The risks are too high due to increased additional buyer’s stamp duty, and they have to sell within five years.”

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Stability, cohesion key to Singapore's success: Chan

They give the nation a competitive advantage in a world of flux, he says

Adrian Lim
Political Correspondent

As Singapore prepares for a leadership transition in the coming years, it needs to send a positive signal to the world about its “stability, cohesion and progressiveness”, said Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing yesterday.

This is so that the Republic can continue to inspire confidence in all investors who want to invest here, to create good jobs for the people, Mr Chan said.

Singapore's stability must be treasured and taken seriously, as it has been instrumental to the country's success and is a “key competitive advantage in a world of flux”,

he noted.

In a 40-minute speech to his constituents, Mr Chan set out the challenges facing Singapore, from global economic uncertainties to geopolitical tensions.

He also highlighted three factors that will keep the country “successful and extraordinary”.

These are stability, strong leadership and ensuring everyone progresses together, he said at a Chinese New Year dinner for Tanjong Pagar GRC and Radin Mas SMC at Safra Mount Faber.

On stability, Mr Chan said investors will not put their money in a country if they do not know what will happen there in five to 15 years' time. Political stability is thus important for Singapore to continue to attract good investments.

Singaporeans must also remain united and cohesive, to set the country apart from the instability in the rest of the world, he noted.

POSITIVE SPIRIT

Ultimately, so long as we have the spirit to want to find new opportunities, build new capabilities, leverage on our strengths, I'm confident that we will be able to overcome the headwinds and achieve growth and benefits for all.



TRADE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER
CHAN CHUN SING

He also stressed the importance of having strong and committed leaders “who have the guts to make bold decisions in the interests of Singapore and Singaporeans for the long term”.

Every generation of leaders must be upfront about the challenges and opportunities Singapore has, and not shy away from making difficult decisions, Mr Chan added.

The Government and people must also never be complacent to let the system slacken or become mediocre, he said.

In his speech, Mr Chan also delved into how Singapore should manage its foreign relations in a challenging global environment, which includes the ongoing trade conflict and competition between the United States and China. Closer to home, new and old bilateral issues with Malaysia – over maritime borders, airspace management and water prices – have also surfaced.

In navigating these developments, Singapore must continue to seek constructive ties with all countries on the basis of mutual benefits and respect, Mr Chan said.

He added that Singapore must never take sides or be used as a proxy for others, and adopt a consistent, long-term approach.

Moving to the uncertainties that the global economy faces, Mr Chan said Singapore – as an open economy that is dependent on global trade – could face challenges.

But he said Singaporeans need not be overly pessimistic, because there remain many opportunities.

He gave the example of how Singapore can play to its strengths in the legal sector, as many companies seek certainty in jurisdictions that provide them with protection for their intellectual property.

Singapore must also not let up on efforts to strengthen and diversify the economy and make it more resilient, he added. This includes diversifying markets and supply chains so the country is never held ransom by any single market, growing the network of free trade agreements to access new opportunities, and training workers so they stay relevant to evolving job demands.

“Ultimately, so long as we have the spirit to want to find new opportunities, build new capabilities, leverage on our strengths, I'm confident that we will be able to overcome the headwinds and achieve growth and benefits for all,” he said.

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Visitors taking wifies at the River Hongbao at Marina Bay yesterday. Around 220,000 people turned up to take photos with the huge displays, including a dragon at the entrance, the Chinese zodiac animals and a giant God of Fortune. They also enjoyed performances by local singers and artists as well as a 10-minute-long firework display. The 2019 Bicentennial edition ends this evening. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

Republic will stay focused on priorities in a tougher year: PM

Aw Cheng Wei

Economic growth this year will likely slow amid global uncertainties, but Singapore will remain squarely focused on its national agenda with healthcare, education and transport as priorities, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Speaking at the annual Teck Ghee Chinese New Year celebration dinner last night, PM Lee said that he hopes Singaporeans will work well with the ruling party's new leaders – led by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat – and keep building Singapore together.

“This year, we see dark clouds on the (economic) horizon... We will work hard, but I expect progress to be harder than last year,” he said.

Last year, the economy grew by 3.3 per cent, meeting the Government's expectations.

Nonetheless, the Government will continue working towards ensuring that healthcare, education and transport will be accessible to and affordable by all, PM Lee added.

National policies have yielded results for the entire country, he said.

In Teck Ghee, these include a new Ren Ci Nursing Home, which has brought integrated care ser-



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Mrs Lee Hsien Loong (partially obscured), MP for Sengkang West; grassroots leader Alex Ng Meng Hwee; Ang Mo Kio GRC MPs Intan Azura Mokhtar, Koh Poh Koon and Darryl David; Dr Ma Suan Hoo, wife of the late senior minister of state Balaji Sadasivan; and grassroots leaders Tan Tai Kiat and Noelene De Foe. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

vices closer to the community; more kindergartens, with one opening in Mayflower Primary School; and four additional bus services serving Ang Mo Kio.

PM Lee said the Government will continue to work hard to achieve stable economic growth here regardless of how the global economy performs. “We will keep innovating and raising our productivity. Only by doing so can we help retain jobs,” he said in Mandarin.

He also thanked the Merdeka Generation who “travelled with us on the journey from Third World to First”, referring to Singaporeans born in the 1950s who accepted hardships and made sacrifices to help shape post-independent Singapore.

“Your sacrifices and commitment have made the prosperity and stability we enjoy possible,” PM Lee said.

He encouraged members of the Merdeka Generation to share their values with their children and grandchildren so “this spirit of contributing to the country and the courage to break new ground can pass from generation to generation”.

PM Lee said: “The resilience of the Merdeka Generation is precious and our younger generations can learn and imbibe it. In the same way, leaders from my generation are also passing the baton to the new team,” he said, adding that the new team will lead everyone to strive for a brighter future for the next generation. “I hope the

younger generation can get along well with the new team, and keep building Singapore together.”

At a separate Chinese New Year event, Geylang Serai was abuzz in a blur of colour and sound yesterday as close to 800 turned up to watch a performance of five dragons – in green, red, white, black and yellow – representing Singapore's east, south, west, north and central areas.

Professor Fatimah Lateef, MP for Marine Parade GRC, took part in the performance by leading the yellow dragon.

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Additional reporting by
Sue-Ann Tan

Burning smell due to fire at landfill in Johor: NEA

The National Environment Agency (NEA) has pinpointed the source of a burning smell in eastern Singapore to a fire at a Johor landfill.

The spokesman said it had contacted Johor's Department of Environment, which confirmed yesterday morning that there was a fire at a landfill in Bandar Tenggara in south-eastern Johor.

“The fire has been burning since Feb 5, 2019, and the Malaysian authorities have been working around the clock to stop the burning,” he added.

NEA confirmed that it has received feedback about a smoky smell in the eastern part of Singapore since 10pm on Friday.

The winds over Singapore have been blowing from the north-east over the past few days and are forecast to persist for the next few days, said the spokesman.

Some Singaporeans were still experiencing a burning smell yesterday morning, according to posts on social media.

The smell was also noticeable on Friday night, affecting people between 10pm and 3am.

Facebook user Chandrakanth Kamath noticed the smell at around 11.30pm in Simei that night, while a resident in Tampines said that she smelled it at 11pm.

People on social media said the haze was hurting their eyes and some complained of difficulties with breathing.

Residents in Paya Lebar also experienced the burning smell at 3am.

According to the NEA website, the PSI on Friday night peaked at 68 from 12am to 3am for the east, which is in the moderate range. The reading was 60 at 10am yesterday.

On Friday morning, a strong burning smell was reported over several parts of eastern Singapore, including Tampines, Bedok and Pasir Ris.

That same afternoon, NEA said: “We are closely monitoring the air quality and will provide updates of any further findings or significant change to the air quality situation.”

Goh Yan Han

WORKING TO PUT OUT FIRE

The fire has been burning since Feb 5, 2019, and the Malaysian authorities have been working around the clock to stop the burning.



NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AGENCY SPOKESMAN, on the fire at a landfill in Bandar Tenggara, south-eastern Johor.

PASS ON SPIRIT OF RESILIENCE

The resilience of the Merdeka Generation is precious and our younger generations can learn and imbibe it. In the same way, leaders from my generation are also passing the baton to the new team. I hope the younger generation can get along well with the new team, and keep building Singapore together.



PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG, who encouraged members of the Merdeka Generation to share their values with their children and grandchildren.



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Ex-princess' bid to enter Thai politics

WHO'S WHO



PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Here are the key personalities in the events following a Thai political party's bid to have a former princess as its prime ministerial candidate, and the key players in the upcoming elections.

KING MAHA VAJIRALONGKORN, 66

Formally known as Rama X of the Chakri dynasty, the King (left) ascended the throne following his father King Bhumibol Adulyadej's death in October 2016. He has since reorganised palace affairs, bolstering his own security detail and granting himself personal stewardship of the multibillion-dollar crown assets. He will officially be crowned King in a ceremony from May 4 to 6.

FORMER PRINCESS UBOLRATANA RAJAKANYA, 67

The elder sister of King Maha Vajiralongkorn was nominated as the prime ministerial candidate of Thai Raksa Chart Party, only for her bid to be stymied by her brother, the King, some 13 hours later. In a world of strict decorum that defines Thai royal life, she stands out for her accessibility – she is an actress and singer, and replies to queries from the more than 97,000 followers of her Instagram account.



PHOTO: EPA-EFE

PRAYUT CHAN-O-CHA, 64

The current prime minister and former army chief led a 2014 coup that ousted a civilian government to end a prolonged period of sometimes deadly unrest. A staunch royalist and an opponent of former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, Mr Prayut (left) accepted the nomination of pro-military Palang Pracharath Party to be its prime ministerial candidate in the upcoming elections.



PHOTO: REUTERS

THAKSIN SHINAWATRA, 69

The former prime minister was ousted in a 2006 coup and has since lived in self-imposed exile to avoid a conviction in 2008 for violating conflict of interest rules, which he says was politically motivated. Despite his legal troubles, Thaksin (left) is still immensely popular with voters from the country's rural north and north-eastern provinces due to his previous populist policies.



Former princess Ubolratana Rajakanya (left, standing) at a World Cup match in Russia last year with Thaksin Shinawatra and his sister Yingluck, both of whom are former prime ministers of Thailand who fled the country to avoid jail terms. PHOTO: WEBSTA

Royal rumble

Thai party faces uncertain fate after King's order ends its audacious bid to nominate ex-princess as PM candidate

Tan Hui Yee
Indochina Bureau Chief
In Bangkok

The headquarters of the Thai political party in the centre of a royal storm was eerily quiet yesterday morning. Its afternoon campaign in Bangkok was called off. None of its executives would pick up their phones or answer reporters' queries.

A handful of bewildered supporters of Thai Raksa Chart Party milled around the office compound in Chaengwattana Road. "Please join us here to show support, there is no one here to oversee matters," one of them pleaded on her mobile phone.

Rumours swirled about the fate of its executive committee, after a late-night statement from King Maha Vajiralongkorn declaring it was highly inappropriate, and even unconstitutional, for his elder sister Ubolratana Rajakanya to be involved in politics.

It was an order that effectively buried Thai Raksa Chart's bid – that lasted 13 hours – to nominate her as its prime ministerial candidate for the March 24 election. Backed by the palace statement, royalist politician Paiboon Nititawan has demanded that the Election Commission start discussions to dissolve Thai Raksa Chart. A party that shocked the nation with its audacious bid to rope in the King's sister could now be fighting for its survival.

THE PHEU THAI SPLINTER
Thai Raksa Chart is just three months old. Headquarters in a rented office compound on the

dusty outskirts of Bangkok, it was formed after the military government loosened restrictions on political activity in preparation for an election.

It does not try very hard to hide the fact that it is a purposeful splinter of the Pheu Thai Party, which won the 2011 election with a commanding majority, only to be kicked out via a military coup in 2014.

Like Pheu Thai, Thai Raksa Chart is linked to Thaksin Shinawatra, a fugitive tycoon and former prime minister who was an adroit electioneer but widely reviled by royalist pro-military factions and blamed for cleaving the country. Thaksin was ousted in a 2006 military coup and lives abroad to evade a jail term for conflict of interest. His strategy of boosting domestic demand to prop up the economy was often tagged as "Thaksinomics".

The Thai initials for Thai Raksa Chart are the same as those for Thaksin's name. Last month, the party unveiled its plan to pursue "techsynamics" – using technology to raise economic prospects.

Several "new generation" politicians introduced by Pheu Thai in September last year hopped over to Thai Raksa Chart mere weeks later. They included Thaksin's niece Chayika Wongnapachant and Mr Ton Na Ranong, the son of former finance minister Kittirat Na Ranong. Other conspicuous former Pheu Thai bigwigs are former deputy prime minister Chaturon Chaisang and former energy minister Pichai Nariphaphan.

Thailand's post-coup Constitution reduces the chances of big parties dominating Parliament. Splinter parties like Thai Raksa Chart help Pheu Thai maximise the num-



ber of seats it can control in the future legislature. In an interview with The Straits Times last year, Thai Raksa Chart's leader Preechapol Pongpanit said: "We play by the rules even though we know this Constitution is not designed for us. We have to play by the rules to sustain the hope of the people who support us." A few months later, it would go on to skirt a major time-honoured rule.

ROYAL OR COMMONER?

Whispers about Ms Ubolratana joining Thai Raksa Chart first surfaced early last week.

Under the new election rules, parties wanting to nominate prime ministers have to name these individuals before the election.

Mr Preechapol told reporters that his party would have a prime minister nominee by the Friday deadline. "There might be a surprise," he said.

Taking the cue, Thai media outlets went to town with stories of this "big surprise", and talk grew louder about a "very important person".

Still, the party kept mum. On the eve of the submission deadline, a speculation rose to fever pitch, key party member Nattawat Saikua was asked by reporters about a "very important person" being nominated as prime minister.

"The executive committee members will decide on that," he said firmly. "I cannot confirm this."

Disbelieving royalists and aristocrats rubbish the rumours. Prince Chulachem Yugala, a retired army major-general, wrote on Facebook: "This country is nonsense and it is babbling."

Ms Ubolratana, 67, is known to have cordial relations with the Shinawatra clan. Last year, she was even photographed watching a World Cup match with Thaksin and his sister Yingluck. Like Thaksin,

Yingluck is a former prime minister who fled Thailand to avoid a jail term for negligence. Still, it was inconceivable that someone so close to the King would agree to become a politician – a class of people often painted as corrupt and self-serving by the elite.

But Ms Ubolratana is an unconventional royal. Born Ubolratana Rajakanya Sirivadhana Barnavadi, she is the eldest child of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit. Apart from the current monarch, she has two other siblings – Princess Sirindhorn, 63, and Princess Chulabhorn, 61.

She relinquished her royal title in 1972 to marry an American whom she met while studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. But she continued to be treated as a member of the royal family after she divorced him in 1998 and moved back home. Even though Ms Ubolratana sings,

Ms Ubolratana attending a news conference during the 61st Cannes Film Festival on May 15, 2008. PHOTO: REUTERS



Left: The quiet headquarters of the Thai Raksa Chart Party in Bangkok yesterday. Its afternoon campaign in Bangkok was called off, and rumours have swirled about the fate of its executive committee. PHOTO: KANNIKAR PETCHKAEW



acts and keeps a well-followed Instagram account, she appears in a television variety show with presenters kneeling on the floor in deference. After her father died in 2016, she stood alongside her siblings as they held elaborate last rites – aired on national television.

While addressed with the title "Tunkramom Ying" which means "Daughter to the Queen Regent", she often calls herself a commoner. It was this grey area that would eventually unravel Thai Raksa Chart.

SHOCK AND AWE

At the auspicious time of 9.30am on Friday, Mr Preechapol, dressed in a sharp navy-blue suit and accompanied by party members, sat before Election Commission officials with a brown envelope bearing his party's prime minister nomination form. With TV stations broadcasting the event live, he opened the envelope and unveiled a form bearing Ms Ubolratana's signature and her smiling photograph, setting off a frenzy among the journalists massed around the table.

Far away from the scrum, Ms Ubolratana wrote on Instagram: "I would like to exercise my rights and freedom as a commoner under the Constitution."

For a while, it looked like the Thaksin-linked faction – ousted frequently by court rulings and military coups for over a decade and bound by new constitutional rules – had turned the tables on its rivals.

Social media exploded with memes pitting Ms Ubolratana against Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, a former army chief who staged the coup in 2014 and was seeking a comeback as premier after the election through his nomination by the Palang Pracharath Party.

This reeled in shock as they tried to understand how a royal family member, considered above politics, could enter an election – and also join a faction often painted by rivals as being anti-monarchy. Bound by a strict decorum that applies to discussion about royal family members, enraged anti-Thaksin royalists and palace circles lobbied for intervention behind the scenes.

The lone official dissent came from royalist politician Paiboon Nititawan, who submitted a request on Friday afternoon asking the Election Commission to nullify the former princess' nomination. The Election Commission had until Feb 15 to decide.

But a statement by the King, uploaded on the Royal Gazette and

aired on television at around 10.30pm, made the call. Ms Ubolratana "lives as a member of the Chakri dynasty" and "involvement of a high-ranking member of the royal family in politics, in whatever way, is an act that conflicts with the country's traditions, customs and culture and therefore is considered extremely inappropriate", the statement said.

LEGAL PERIL

Political veterans and activists know what is coming next.

"I think Thai Raksa Chart Party should change its executive committee," said Ms Tida Tawornseth, an adviser to the "red shirt" United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship, which has members in Pheu Thai and Thai Raksa Chart. "Right now, it's very dangerous. They could dissolve the party."

Thaksin's first party, Thai Rak Thai, was dissolved in 2007 for electoral fraud and its key members were banned from politics for five years. Its next iteration, the People's Power Party, was dissolved one year later.

If Thai Raksa Chart is ruled to have violated election rules by nominating Ms Ubolratana as its prime ministerial candidate, it will very likely face the same fate. Once the constitutional court ac-

cepts a petition to consider dissolving the party, the Election Commission has the power to stop the party from campaigning in the election, said Dr Sithorn Thannithichot, a political scientist from King Prajadhipok's Institute. This will make Pheu Thai's splintering strategy go awry, channelling its votes to other parties like the progressive-minded Future Forward Party.

After hours of silence, Thai Raksa Chart issued a statement yesterday saying that it would heed the King's order. "Thai Raksa Chart Party complies with the royal command with loyalty to the King and all members of the royal family," it said. By way of consolation, Thaksin tweeted: "Chin up and keep moving forward!"

Mr Preechapol's mother, Ms Rabiearth Pongpanit, was quoted by reporters as assuring that her son was "fine". But the party headquarters remained deserted in the afternoon, its brief dalliance with royalty having cast a threatening pall over its future.

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Additional reporting by Kannikar Petchkaew

The media scrum surrounding Thai Raksa Chart Party leader Preechapol Pongpanit (centre, left) as he submitted his party's prime minister nomination form at the Election Commission in Bangkok on Friday. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

News analysis

Whither Thai Raksa Chart, Thaksin?

The future of the Thai Raksa Chart Party linked to Thaksin Shinawatra is now uncertain after the Thai King thwarted his sister's bid to be the party's prime minister nominee, making it harder for the former premier to make a comeback.

In contrast, the dramatic events that unfolded last Friday may help the junta consolidate its power and even boost incumbent Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's chances in the March 24 polls, analysts told The Sunday Times.

Mr Prayut is the junta-linked Palang Pracharath party's prime minister candidate.

"This is a big setback for Thai Raksa Chart and Thaksin in particular. For Thai Raksa Chart, it could represent the party's death knell," said Dr Paul Chambers, an expert on Thai politics at Thailand's Naresuan University.

"The King will be less willing to work with a pro-Thaksin government and previously uncommitted Thai voters might now shift against Thaksin. (Instead), the King may now favour Prayut's candidacy and Thai voters may see Ubolratana's actions as a result of Thaksin's machinations for power."

King Maha Vajiralongkorn denounced the candidacy of former princess Ubolratana Rajakanya Sirivadhana Barnavadi for prime minister late last Friday in a dramatic reversal after Thai Raksa Chart put her forward for the post.

The announcement effectively invalidates Ms Ubolratana's unprecedented bid for prime minister.

The King's intervention also leaves Thai Raksa Chart without a candidate for prime minister because the deadline for parties to name their candidates was Friday.

The party could be in legal peril if it is judged to have violated the rules by nominating a member of the royal family as a candidate. Thailand is a constitutional monarchy and has not had someone so close to the inner palace circle run for office.

For years, Thai politics has been defined by the bitter divide between royalist pro-military factions and Thaksin-linked groups which fashion themselves as advocates for democracy but are sometimes labelled as anti-monarchy.

Thai Raksa Chart, together with its ally Pheu Thai, are seen as proxies of Thaksin, who was ousted in a 2006 coup and lives in self-imposed exile abroad. Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra, who became prime minister after the 2011 election, is also in exile. She was ousted by a court ruling for corruption offences before the 2014 coup.

Despite the setback suffered by Thaksin, Mr James Chin, the director of the Asia Institute at University of Tasmania, warned that the fugitive ex-premier still commands large support in the country's rural areas, especially in the north-west, and political reconciliation will be difficult.

"As long as Thaksin is not part of any political settlement, Thailand will still be politically unstable... the junta cannot bring political stability back even with the election as rural folks will not be able to accept the results," he said.

Still, this may not be the end for Thai Raksa Chart and parties aligned to Thaksin.

"Thai Raksa Chart and Pheu Thai were always going to campaign on the basis of voter loyalty to Thaksin, above all in the provinces. We can expect that they will continue to adhere to that strategy," said Dr Michael Montesano, coordinator of the Thailand Studies Programme at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

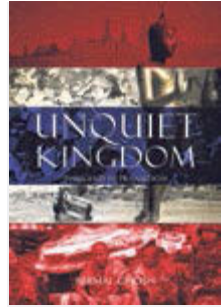
In the weeks between now and the polls, these parties are likely to find ways to emphasise messages that reflect that strategy. Those messages will be framed in ways designed to overcome the apparent setback of the past 24 hours," he added.

HUGE BLOW

This is a big setback for Thai Raksa Chart and Thaksin in particular... it could represent the party's death knell.



DR PAUL CHAMBERS, an expert on Thai politics at Thailand's Naresuan University.



DELVE INTO THE INTRIGUE OF THAI POLITICS
Uncover Thailand's complexities in the book Unquiet Kingdom by Nirmal Ghosh, ST's former foreign correspondent.
https://stbooks.sg/



Crematorium workers allegedly gave preferential treatment to some in return for red packets

ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

Charmaine Ng
and Cara Wong

Crematorium workers involved in a corruption probe did allegedly give preferential treatment to funeral directors for funerary arrangements in return for red packets from them, said the National Environment Agency (NEA).

The agency gave this update in a statement on Friday that sheds more light on the ongoing probe by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) involving more than 20 workers from the NEA-run Mandai Crematorium and private funeral businesses.

The case has stirred confusion – and debate – among some on whether it is appropriate for public servants to accept gifts such as red packets during festive or special occasions, and when it might be deemed a corrupt act.

According to several funeral directors interviewed in initial media reports, the red packets, or hongbao, were given by the grieving families to crematorium workers as tokens of appreciation.

This practice has reportedly been going on for decades though it is illegal as crematorium workers, being public servants under NEA's employment, are not allowed to accept gifts.

In Mandai Crematorium's service halls and waiting areas, there are signs to remind all that the giving of cash or gifts to crematorium staff is "strictly prohibited".

But funeral directors had said they do not receive any benefit in conveying the hongbao, with the market rate around \$20.

They also said that families are not pressed to give the money and that no preferential treatment is given to those who do so.

INITIAL UNCERTAINTY

As a result, several readers wrote to The Straits Times querying why this practice would be viewed as corrupt by the authorities, which had received tip-offs last year.

In a Feb 7 Forum letter, reader Dr Ho Ting Fei wrote that "it is natural and culturally acceptable for families to express their thanks – and some believe as a gesture to dispel any bad luck – to the workers by giving them gifts of cash or red packets". Dr Ho described the act as "equivalent to giving a tip for good service".

Another Forum writer, Mr Tan Whee Cheng, said that these red packets usually contain small amounts. "It can be hurtful for a person to express his heartfelt appreciation for the help received during a difficult period only to have it rejected," he added.

News of the probe prompted retiree Susan Ng not to take any chances with her annual Chinese New Year practice of giving \$10 hongbao to cleaners at her HDB block in Aljunied.

"Now with this incident, I don't know if the cleaners will get into trouble, or if I will get into trouble for giving them hongbao," said Madam Ng, who is in her 60s.

Under the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), those convicted can

be fined up to \$100,000, jailed up to five years or both, for each act of corruption.

If the corrupt transaction is in relation to a contract or a proposal for a contract with the Government, those convicted can be fined up to \$100,000, jailed up to seven years or both, for each act of corruption.

PRESUMPTIVE CORRUPTION

Asked for rules on public servants receiving gifts and also details on the probe, the CPIB told The Sunday Times that public servants are expected to maintain high standards of conduct and integrity.

"They are therefore not allowed to accept gifts and entertainment on account of their official position or official work. Gifts include money, goods, services and benefits in kind," said a spokesman. "Where it is inappropriate or impractical to decline a gift, public officers must declare the gift promptly."

The CPIB, which said it is unable to comment on the probe as investigations are ongoing, added that staff of government vendors are also advised to follow the same code of conduct.

Public servants include teachers, officers from the Singapore Police Force and Singapore Civil Defence Force, and those who work in statutory boards. Under the Town Councils Act, town council staff and employees of its managing agent are considered public servants.

Doctors, nurses and those who work in public hospitals are not considered public servants. Postmen too do not fall in this category.

The Ministry of Health said public hospitals are guided by similar policies and that its employees, including healthcare professionals, must not accept gifts or cash offered so as to prevent potential conflict of interest. "Where it is not possible to decline, the employee must declare the gift," said a spokesman.

Since news emerged of the probe, the CPIB has published on its website a new section on whether the local practice of giving small tokens of appreciation is allowed.

"The act of giving a genuine gift (such as red packets) in itself without any corrupt intention is not considered corruption.

"However, if the gift is given secretly, or in a manner that attempts to avoid notice or attention with a view to securing personal special privilege or advantage and more so at the expense of the recipient's principal's/employer's interest (that is, resulting in a compromise of the recipient's official duties), it may be deemed to be corrupt and hence an offence under the Prevention of Corruption Act."

Corporate governance advocate Mak Yuen Teen said anti-corruption laws are "intentionally stricter" for public servants.

Even if the red packets are given as gestures of appreciation, or as a custom after the tasks, there could be a presumption of corruption when a public servant is involved.

The associate professor of accounting at the National University of Singapore Business School said that under the Act, public servants or individuals employed by the Gov-

WHEN IT IS DEEMED A CORRUPT ACT

The act of giving a genuine gift (such as red packets) in itself without any corrupt intention is not considered corruption. However, if the gift is given secretly, or in a manner that attempts to avoid notice or attention with a view to securing personal special privilege or advantage... it may be deemed to be corrupt and hence an offence under the Prevention of Corruption Act.



CORRUPT PRACTICES INVESTIGATION BUREAU, on giving public workers small tokens of appreciation.

ernment who have given or received gratifications will be presumed to be corrupt unless proven otherwise.

DISCRETION NEEDED?

But Prof Mak noted that the concept of gratification is defined "very broadly" in the PCA.

"My view is that if it's red packets given as gestures with no preferential treatment, we should not use the fine print of the PCA and Penal Code to prosecute the workers," he said. "Would CPIB also prosecute the families that give the hongbao? Some discretion is needed in enforcing the law here."

Lawyer Joy Tan, partner at Wong-Partnership, said the receipt of a gift in contravention of some rule or policy may demonstrate corrupt intent but would not automatically amount to corruption. "Conversely, just because a practice of receiving a gift is widespread does not necessarily mean that there is no corrupt intent behind it," she added.

Several funeral directors told The Sunday Times that preferential treatment at Mandai crematorium is given sometimes based on connections, and not just because red packets may have been given.

When helping bereaved families conduct wakes, funeral directors deal with crematorium workers, who conduct the cremation services, to arrange service and cremation timings.

Speaking in general, lawyer Joseph Tan from Invictus Law Corporation said that while there may have been preferential treatment given by the recipients of hongbao, this in itself may not amount to corruption.

He cited how while he expects nothing from giving red packets to the cleaners and maintenance workers at his workplace every Chinese New Year, he may still receive preferential treatment. "When you treat someone nice, people remember you and they might go out of their way to help you, but does that mean corruption?" he added.

In its response to media queries, CPIB advises caution with gifts that involve parties with whom one has an official relationship. While a gift given innocently and without any corrupt intention is not considered corruption, if it "is given or received with a view to secure, or to reciprocate with, for example an unfair advantage, it may be corruption".

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Trump to meet Kim in Hanoi for second summit

WASHINGTON • President Donald Trump said he will hold his second summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi later this month.

His tweet announcing the meeting was followed by another predicting North Korea would become "a great economic powerhouse", thanks to Mr Kim's leadership.

"My representatives have just left North Korea after a very productive meeting and an agreed-upon time and date for the second summit with Kim Jong Un," Mr Trump wrote on Friday night. "It will take place in Hanoi, Vietnam, on February 27 & 28. I look forward to seeing Chairman Kim & advancing the cause of peace!"

The upcoming meeting follows a historic summit in Singapore last June. In his State of the Union address last week, Mr Trump said that, while "much work remains to be done", he was hopeful his "good" relationship with the North Korean leader would yield results in ongoing nuclear talks.

"We continue our historic push for peace on the Korean Peninsula," Mr Trump said.

In the second tweet, Mr Trump predicted a promising future for Mr Kim and North Korea.

"North Korea, under the leadership of Kim Jong Un, will become a great economic powerhouse. He may surprise some but he won't surprise me, because I have gotten to know him & fully understand how capable he is. North Korea



The presidential palace in Hanoi. The US and North Korean leaders are set to meet in the Vietnamese capital later this month. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

will become a different kind of rocket – an economic one!"

Before their first meeting, Mr Trump derided Mr Kim as "Little Rocket Man" with nuclear ambitions. The North Korean regime has long been regarded as one of the world's most repressive governments and responsible for widespread human-rights violations.

Meanwhile, Mr Trump's special envoy Stephen Biegun said yesterday that the United States has "some hard work" to do with North Korea before the second Trump-Kim summit.

Mr Trump is "very much looking forward to taking the next steps," according to a pool transcript of

PROMISING FUTURE FOR NORTH KOREA

North Korea, under the leadership of Kim Jong Un, will become a great economic powerhouse. He may surprise some but he won't surprise me, because I have gotten to know him & fully understand how capable he is. North Korea will become a different kind of rocket – an economic one!



PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP, in a tweet.

Mr Biegun's remarks.

The envoy had spent three days negotiating with officials in Pyongyang before his meeting with South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha in Seoul.

"I'm confident that, if both sides stay committed, we can make real progress here," Mr Biegun said. "We don't know where it's going to go but we are in the midst of a conversation with the North and our discussions were productive."

Mr Biegun didn't say exactly what steps were left to take with North Korea.

Mr Trump will face pressure to achieve more during his upcoming next meeting with Mr Kim, after the first summit did not yield commitments from Mr Kim to allow weapons inspections or dismantle its growing arsenal of warheads and intercontinental ballistic missiles.

In recent months, North Korea has said it would consider a step-by-step approach, pairing actions to denuclearise with incentives, including the removal of economic sanctions crippling its economy.

In a New Year's address, Mr Kim threatened a "new path" if the US didn't ease "vicious" sanctions.

A US administration official said that Mr Kim preferred Hanoi over Danang, another Vietnamese city that was considered for the summit. The official, who was granted anonymity to discuss the preparations for the meeting, said Vietnamese officials considered their capital a more prestigious setting, and that Mr Trump did not particularly care either way.

Vietnam was considered a favourable location for the summit because Mr Kim could travel to the country with a flight largely over friendly Chinese territory.

BLOOMBERG

Guide to upcoming summit

US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will attempt to iron out the details of a history-making agreement on denuclearisation when the pair meet on Feb 27-28 in Vietnam for their second face-to-face dialogue.

Here's what to expect at the upcoming summit.

NEGOTIATORS

The North Korean diplomats and officials likely to attend the meeting are some of the country's most experienced negotiators, who have deftly wrangled with several American administrations.

Among those expected are Mr Ri Yong Ho, a seasoned diplomat who represented North Korea for years during the "six-party talks" in the 2000s and is now the country's foreign minister; and Mr Kim Yong Chol, a former spymaster and one of Mr Kim Jong Un's closest advisers.

Those expected to join Mr Trump include Secretary of State Mike Pompeo; National Security Adviser John Bolton, who has disagreed with Mr Trump on the success of the Singapore talks; and Mr Stephen Biegun, a former Ford Motor executive who was recently appointed to oversee talks with the North Koreans.

AGENDA

At the Singapore talks last June, Mr Kim and Mr Trump agreed to a four-point plan. The bullet points included establishing relations between their countries; building a "lasting and stable

peace regime"; working "towards complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula"; and repatriating the remains of Americans killed during the Korean War.

Left undecided were the order in which those points were to be executed and the definitions of terms like "peace regime" and "complete denuclearisation".

Effectively, the countries are locked in the same stalemate they have been for years. Washington wants North Korea to end its nuclear weapons programme. But, for the North, those weapons are the only leverage it has to get what it really wants – a formal end to the Korean War and diplomatic recognition from the United States.

The North said as recently as last December that it would not dismantle its weapons programme until the United States diminished its military capacity in the vicinity of the Korean peninsula.

VENUE

Vietnam is a powerful symbolic choice. Like North Korea, Vietnam and the US had fraught relations for decades after a deadly war. More recently, the countries have normalised relations.

Vietnam, like North Korea, is a communist country. Through capitalist reforms it has emerged from international isolation to become one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

It is a model Mr Trump hopes will inspire North Korea.

NYTIMES

Ahok joins Indonesia's ruling party PDI-P

Speculation over whether he will campaign for President Joko in polls

Linda Yulisman
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

Former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, who was recently released from jail, has joined the political party of President Joko Widodo, just two months before the elections.

Mr Basuki said in Bali on Friday that he has joined the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), the biggest party in Parliament, raising speculation over whether he would be campaigning for Mr Joko, his close ally who is seeking re-election in the April 17 polls.

Active campaigning by Mr Basuki could hamper, not help, the President's campaign. This is because Mr Basuki, a Chinese-Christian politician, is an easy target for Islamic conservatives and hardliners, a group largely seen as being against the re-election of Mr Joko.

Mr Basuki lost in the 2017 gubernatorial election after his opponent played the religion card, triggering massive street rallies involving tens of thousands of Muslims protesting against him. Mr Basuki was later convicted of blasphemy against Islam. He was sentenced to a two-year jail term and released on Jan 24 after getting remission.

A senior PDI-P official said yesterday that Mr Basuki, widely known by his Chinese nickname Ahok, will not be involved in the ongoing presidential campaign because of personal matters. PDI-P secretary-general Hastu Kristiyanto told The Sunday Times: "He will not take part in the campaign as he has his own agenda abroad for 2½ months."

Mr Basuki, 52, had indicated that he would soon marry his girlfriend Puput Nastiti Devi, 21.

Mr Hastu said that as an ordinary party member, Mr Basuki will be given assignments and undergo processes such as political training.

Mr Basuki's political career is



Former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, who was released from jail recently, visiting the office of Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) in Bali on Friday. He joins the political party of President Joko Widodo just before the April 17 polls, but a senior party official said Mr Basuki – widely known as Ahok – will not be involved in the ongoing presidential campaign. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

closely watched because of his meteoric rise before his downfall.

He began his political career by becoming a member of the regional legislative council in his native East Belitung regency in Bangka Belitung Islands province in 2004, through the New Indonesia Alliance Party. He was also a member of Indonesia's major parties Golkar and Gerindra. The latter's leader Prabowo Subianto is challenging Mr Joko in the presidential polls.

In the run-up to the 2017 gubernatorial election, Mr Basuki was poised to make history as the first elected governor of Jakarta who was not only Chinese but also Christian. But his straight-talking manner

ADAPTING TO POLITICAL CULTURE

The internal political patronage in PDI-P is very strong, while Ahok is typically a free and open person. So political adaptation remains his challenge.



MR ARYA FERNANDES, a political expert from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, referring to Mr Basuki.

and championing of pluralism, which endeared him to many, also saw his opponents turning that against him.

Experts have pointed out that since his release from prison, Mr Basuki has refrained from speaking about politics so as not to jeopardise the re-election bid of Mr Joko.

The incumbent is leading in the presidential campaign against Mr Prabowo, but with three more televised debates in the next few weeks, the campaign dynamics could change quickly over the next two months. The debates feature both the presidential candidates and their respective running mates, senior cleric Ma'ruf Amin and for-

mer businessman Sandiaga Uno.

Mr Arya Fernandes, a political expert from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, said that Mr Basuki's role in PDI-P and in politics will not materialise soon.

The party has to assess what will be an appropriate position for Mr Basuki and the impact he will bring to the party. He also needs to adapt to its political culture, which is different from that of his previous parties.

"The internal political patronage in PDI-P is very strong, while Ahok is typically a free and open person. So political adaptation remains his challenge," Mr Arya said.

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Amelia Teng
Education Correspondent

Each year, new certificates for more than 60,000 Singapore students bear the name of Cambridge – part of a longstanding relationship with the British-based examination group which dates back to 1892. That was when the first Cambridge local examinations were conducted here, at a time when Singapore was under colonial rule.

But nearly 130 years later – after it was revealed last month that 32 O-level Additional Mathematics Paper 2 scripts were lost on a train in Britain – questions are being raised on why Singapore continues to rely on Cambridge Assessment to set and mark its papers.

In 2017, a parcel containing A-level Chemistry answer scripts from 238 Singapore students was stolen from a locked courier van en route to an examiner in Britain.

Some are also asking if it is still necessary for most students here to take exams linked to the British exam board given that Singapore sets the teaching content.

Mr Seah Yam Meng, a retired civil servant who wrote to the ST Forum last month, said: “The need to rely on Cambridge University’s established reputation to boost the credibility of our educational qualifications was understandable in the first 50 years of our development.

“But as a First World country whose education system is ranked among the best in the world, we should be confident enough to mark our own exam scripts by now.”

In response to queries, the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB) said that it has a longstanding working relationship with Cambridge Assessment, with the latest agreement signed in 2013 on the delivery of the GCE N/O/A-level exams here.

SEAB, when queried on how much it pays Cambridge, said the sum varies yearly depending on the number of candidates and volume of subjects and papers. In 2017, for instance, it cost \$19 million for the setting and reviewing of more than 300 papers across 140 subjects, and the marking and processing of about 800,000 scripts for about 67,000 candidates.

So why can’t Singapore’s own exam scripts be marked locally?

It is not due to a lack of expertise, but a simple matter of numbers and available resources.

SEAB said: “Given the large number of subjects and papers examined in the GCE-level examinations, any changes to the conduct of the national examination or the examination processes must be carefully planned, taking into consideration the timeline and resources available.”

Associate Professor Jason Tan from the National Institute of Education added: “I have no doubt that we have the marking expertise, but it’s a logistics issue because we have to rope in local teachers.”

To reduce the risk of answer scripts being lost or stolen while being transported, SEAB said that almost all exam papers across the three levels (O, N and A levels) – except those that include coursework materials – will, by this year, be marked electronically.

A HISTORICAL LEGACY?

But why does Singapore, which has an education system that has been recognised as one of the world’s best, continue to link itself with Cambridge after so many years, while other former British colonies have cut ties and developed their own qualifications?

Hong Kong and Malaysia have replaced the O levels with their own certification, along with several Caribbean countries, while New Zealand and Australia have their own exam systems.

Others, like India, Mauritius and Bangladesh, have their own school certificates, with the O levels of-

Does Singapore education still need the Cambridge brand?

Some question need for exams here to be linked to British group as S’pore sets teaching content



Students checking their A-level result slips last year in Nanyang Junior College, one of the four schools affected by the theft of exam scripts for Chemistry Paper 3 in 2017. The scripts were being delivered to an examiner in Britain in November that year when they were stolen from a locked courier van. ST FILE PHOTO

ferred as an alternative in private and international schools.

Sri Lanka and Brunei are among the few countries which continue to use the O levels for most students.

Prof Tan said in the early years, the exams and syllabuses from Cambridge were not always relevant to Singapore but, in the 1960s, there was a shift to localise the content of different subjects like geography and history.

Over the last two decades, Singapore has taken greater control of the A levels and O levels – since 2002 and 2006 respectively – in setting curricula and awarding grades.

The SEAB, set up in 2004, and the Ministry of Education (MOE) come up with the teaching and examination syllabuses, on which the exams are based.

They also determine the marking standards and award grades, together with Cambridge Assessment.

While it bears the O-level brand, the exam here is also not linked to the British equivalents or the inter-

TIME TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP

The need to rely on Cambridge University’s established reputation to boost the credibility of our educational qualifications was understandable in the first 50 years of our development. But as a First World country whose education system is ranked among the best in the world, we should be confident enough to mark our own exam scripts by now.



MR SEAH YAM MENG, a retired civil servant who wrote to the ST Forum last month, on the continued reliance on Cambridge.

national version of the GCE exams.

Secondary schools here also offer uniquely Singapore O-level subjects like computing in more applied areas, while the N levels – for less academically inclined students – was introduced in the 1980s by MOE.

But despite moving away from Cambridge in terms of subject matter, SEAB still engages Cambridge Assessment as it has “deep exper-

ise and rich experience in setting and marking national examinations worldwide”.

“(It) also taps the expertise and domain knowledge of a pool of professors and experienced educators from the universities and institutions in the UK,” said SEAB.

Prof Tan added: “There is international prestige awarded to Cambridge, which continues to conduct many exams around the world.”

NEED TO CONSIDER TIMELINE AND RESOURCES

Given the large number of subjects and papers examined in the GCE-level examinations, any changes to the conduct of the national examination or the examination processes must be carefully planned, taking into consideration the timeline and resources available.



THE SINGAPORE EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENT BOARD, on whether Singapore candidates’ exam scripts can be marked locally.

He noted that it is possible to have alternatives, such as the International Baccalaureate diploma or the NUS High School Diploma, which are also recognised widely.

“But it takes a lot of work to secure legitimacy for new qualifications, and Singapore is cautious in abandoning its links with Cambridge as they have served Singapore well all these years,” he said.

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Timeline of exams in S’pore

1867

Singapore comes under the direct rule of the Colonial Office in London as part of the Straits Settlement.

1892

First Cambridge local exams conducted by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, rebranded as Cambridge Assessment today. Exams known as Junior and Senior Cambridge Examinations.

1944-45

Cambridge exams continue on a very small scale under the Japanese in a prison camp in Sime Road.

From 1946

English secondary schools resume the Cambridge School Certificate (today’s O levels) and the Higher School Certificate (A levels).

1960s

Singapore moves towards a national educational system with common curricula and standards for all four language streams. Schools in the English stream continue with Cambridge exams, while the Ministry of Education (MOE) holds exams for schools in the Chinese, Malay and Tamil streams.

1971

The Singapore-Cambridge GCE O-level Exam replaces the School Certificate exams.

1975

The Singapore-Cambridge GCE A-level Exam replaces the Higher School Certificate.

1984

GCE N-level Exam is introduced for students in the Normal stream.

2002

MOE takes greater control of A levels in designing the syllabus, exam format and awarding of grades.

2004

The Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board is established.

2006

MOE assumes more responsibility of the O levels by taking over curricula development and setting papers.

Amelia Teng

Wirecard challenges fraud allegations after stock plunge

MUNICH • German online payments firm Wirecard has seen its stock plunge by more than a third in recent days on reports of accounting misdeeds at its Singapore unit. Now, the company is fighting back by questioning the foundations of the allegations.

A preliminary review last May by a respected Singapore law firm lists allegations of potential financial irregularities, money laundering and forgery at Wirecard’s Asian unit. But the German company says the report is based on evidence that is either faulty or forged.

A deeper investigation by the law firm so far has not “found any evidence of criminal misconduct”, Wirecard chief executive officer Markus Braun said by phone on Friday from the company’s headquar-

ters near Munich. “This whole issue will be resolved quickly.”

Yet investors got another red flag when Singapore police raided Wirecard’s offices on Friday, ratcheting up concerns over its accounting practices.

A company spokesman said the firm had “provided the police with comprehensive supporting material with regard to their inquiry”.

The 31-page initial investigation that the law firm Rajah & Tann completed was largely based on the accounts of a person the lawyers call “Bobby”. It described allegations of criminal activity ranging from backdated agreements to forged invoices.

Rajah & Tann declined to comment.

Wirecard said the report was au-

thentic, but that the findings relied on documents of suspicious provenance, possibly intended to damage Wirecard or profit from short-sales as its stock has lost some €9 billion (\$\$13.8 billion) in value since the Financial Times published the allegations on Jan 30.

“We think this was all done to put pressure on the share price,” Mr Braun said.

German prosecutors say they have launched a market manipulation probe in response to a criminal complaint Wirecard filed after the share drop.

Officials have not named any suspects and said they have not found any reason to investigate Wirecard employees over accounting fraud allegations.

After Rajah & Tann wrapped up

Rajah & Tann’s preliminary investigation focused on three Wirecard employees in Singapore. There was evidence to suggest they “knowingly worked together to create and backdate agreements billed by Wirecard Singapore up to three years prior”, the report said.

the May report, Wirecard said it hired the firm to do a fuller investigation.

Mr Braun saw the May report for the first time over a week ago, and he said that until then the entire affair had been handled by the company’s internal compliance team, which by design does not include the CEO in order to avoid undue pressure from top management.

Mr Braun said a final report would be available in “a matter of weeks” and he was confident it would clear the company and its employees of wrongdoing.

Rajah & Tann’s preliminary investigation focused on three Wirecard employees in Singapore.

There was evidence to suggest they “knowingly worked together to create and backdate agreements

billed by Wirecard Singapore up to three years prior”, the report said. The documents cited actual companies, but the lawyers said they did not include correspondence to back up a real commercial relationship.

“To date, we have not seen a single e-mail from any of the counterparties which, given the nature and size of the deals, raises doubt as to the authenticity of the same,” the lawyers wrote. “There are strong reasons to believe that both the agreements and invoices may be fictitious.”

Mr Braun said the investigators preparing the report did not have access to the company’s servers to judge the authenticity of those e-mails. He pointed to a statement last week by Rajah & Tann that said in preparing its new report, the lawyers had “made no conclusive findings of criminal misconduct on the part of any officer or employee of the Company”. BLOOMBERG



1,500

Number of mid-career Singaporeans and permanent residents who have signed up for the healthcare professional conversion programmes since they were started in 2003.

1,200

Number who have studied to become nurses.

300

Estimated number who have opted for training to become a physiotherapist, occupational therapist or diagnostic radiographer.

Senior Minister of State for Health Amy Khor speaking to Ms Angela Huang, who successfully made a mid-career switch to become a physiotherapist, at the launch of the new degree programme at Singapore Institute of Technology yesterday.
ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

Faster mid-career path for would-be physiotherapists

Accelerated SIT scheme aimed at locals with science-related degree

Felicia Choo

Those wanting to make a mid-career switch to physiotherapy can now enrol in an accelerated degree programme launched yesterday.

The Professional Conversion Programme for Physiotherapists (Accelerated) offered by the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) is aimed at mid-career locals who already have a science-related degree, including exercise and sports sciences and life sciences.

The accelerated programme, which starts in September, can be completed in under three years.

SIT already offers a four-year professional conversion programme for physiotherapists that is open to diploma and A-level holders, as well as those who are making mid-career switches.

These career conversion programmes are offered by Workforce Singapore and targeted at professionals, managers, executives and technicians.

Senior Minister of State for Health Amy Khor, who attended the launch at SIT, said: "Healthcare is a growing sector due to the ageing population and growing incidence of chronic disease. We need

more healthcare professionals to meet the needs of Singaporeans."

She added: "Allied healthcare is one of the key sectors, particularly because we are transitioning care with more emphasis from the hospital to the community."

Since the healthcare professional conversion programmes were started in 2003, nearly 1,500 mid-career Singaporeans and permanent residents have signed up for them.

Of these, 1,200 studied to become nurses, while close to 300 opted for training to become a physiotherapist, occupational therapist or diagnostic radiographer.

These healthcare professional conversion programmes are jointly

offered by Workforce Singapore and the Ministry of Health (MOH).

Dr Khor said that interest has been growing, with 150 mid-career locals joining last year, which is more than double the average number of participants for the last three years.

She added that MOH will continue to review demand and look at introducing accelerated programmes for other healthcare professions.

Those enrolling in the accelerated programme for physiotherapy will enter as Year 2 students in the four-year course. Fees are fully sponsored, and trainees will also receive monthly training allowances ranging from \$2,100 to \$2,450, which are pegged to their prior

years of work experience.

They will also receive a one-time bonus of \$2,000 upon graduating and have to serve a four-year bond with their sponsoring company.

SIT said that this year's intake sees 200 students in total joining the two physiotherapy programmes it offers.

Of the current 360 students who are enrolled in the four-year programme, about 20 per cent are those making mid-career switches.

Applications for the accelerated programme for physiotherapy opened on Feb 1 and will close on March 19.

Ms Angela Huang, 33, is one of those who have made a successful transition to physiotherapy.

The former medical technologist wanted to make a bigger difference in patients' lives and enrolled in Nanyang Polytechnic's three-year diploma in physiotherapy in 2013.

"Being a physiotherapist is quite physical because I have to be on my feet the whole day, but I feel very happy when my patients' physical function and mood improve," said Ms Huang, who has been working at St Luke's Hospital since 2016.

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Continue to work and learn for active ageing, urges Tharman

Singapore needs to enable its people to work as long as possible and make lifelong learning a norm, Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam said yesterday.

Along with making kindness a way of life and getting involved in the community, these were the three components of living life to the fullest, said Mr Tharman.

He was speaking at the launch of a book by Dr William Wan, general secretary of the Singapore Kindness Movement, called *Through The Valley: The Art Of Living And Leaving Well*, which delves into topics like joyful ageing and grief.

Mr Tharman said first of all, work must be made interesting so that people would want to work as long as possible.

Work also has to be re-envisioned as society ages, jobs should change

to suit the abilities of people, and workers should have their contributions recognised.

"Age does take its toll on our brains and our bodies, but it can be resisted," he said. "And the way to resist it is to keep learning, stay active and continue to contribute."

The book also pays testimony to Dr Wan's eight brushes with death, including two car accidents where he broke a leg in one and had to have his ear stitched back in another.

Dr Wan was inspired to pen the book after receiving the Active Ager Award from the Council for the Third Age in 2011, and being made an Active Ageing Ambassador the same year.

"The objective is very simple. I wanted to share about how I see active ageing; how I am, in fact, an active ager. What do I do every

day? Every year? How do I see meaning and purpose in life?" he said, at the event at the Science Centre Singapore.

"I don't know when I'm going to die... so I have this period called life in between the two (birth and expiry) dates. And, really, how then should I live?" he added. "And this is what the book is about."

Dr Wan, 71, has worked as a pastor, lawyer and lecturer in theology. He took a three-month sabbatical last year to write the book, which sold more than 3,000 copies out of its first print run of 3,500 copies. A reprint has been ordered.

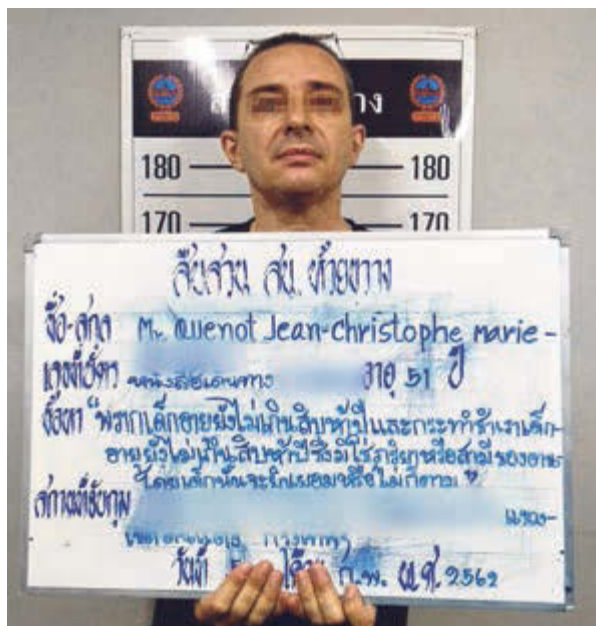
He will be speaking with Straits Times journalist Lee Siew Hua at the next session of The Straits Times Book Club on Feb 27.

Felicia Choo



Author William Wan (right) and Science Centre Singapore chief executive Lim Tit Meng, who moderated the session, at the book launch yesterday. The book delves into topics like joyful ageing and grief. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

French national Jean-Christophe Quenot, who taught at the MOE Language Centre, was arrested in a hotel room in Bangkok on Monday. He allegedly invited boys he met in Bangkok to his hotel room for sex in exchange for cash.
PHOTO: ROYAL THAI POLICE



Man held over alleged child sex worked for MOE for 18 years

Fabian Koh

The French-language teacher arrested in Bangkok for allegedly having sex with minors had been working for Singapore's Ministry of Education (MOE) for the past 18 years.

An MOE spokesman told The Sunday Times on Friday night that

French national Jean-Christophe Quenot, 51, was "appointed as a teacher in 2001". He taught at the MOE Language Centre.

He had undergone a pre-employment screening process before being hired, as is standard practice with all potential employees.

"Each applicant goes through background screening and health

checks," said the MOE spokesman. "Their professional qualifications, criminal and financial declarations are also vetted."

The MOE spokesman added that the ministry recruits a "small number of foreign teachers" to supplement its teaching workforce for specific subjects.

She noted that the well-being of students is of "utmost priority" and that "MOE will provide the necessary support to ensure that there is no disruption to the lessons of its students".

There are two campuses, in Bishan and Newton, and both conduct foreign language classes in seven languages, including French, German and Japanese, for its students.

Quenot was arrested in a hotel room in the Thai capital of Bangkok

on Monday, according to reports in Thai media.

At a press conference on Wednesday, the commander of the Metropolitan Police, Major-General Senit Samrarnsamruajkit, alleged that Quenot met boys aged 13 to 15 at the Huay Kwang Stadium in Bangkok, and offered to teach them English and coach them in football a year ago. He then allegedly invited some boys to his hotel room for sex in exchange for cash.

When police arrested him on Monday, officers found a camera tripod in the hotel room and a video of Quenot having sex with a teenage boy, according to Thai reports. They also found a computer with pornographic films.

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More in S'pore turning to adoption



Ms Lin Xiu Zhen and her husband Ivan Yeo with their daughter Zara, two, whom they adopted from Malaysia when she was one month old. About 30 per cent of the adoption applications in the past five years involved Singaporean children – the rest were mostly babies from Malaysia and Indonesia. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Number of kids who found adoptive parents here last year the highest in almost a decade

Theresa Tan
Senior Social Affairs
Correspondent

The number of children who found adoptive parents here last year was the highest in almost a decade, as more couples suffer from fertility problems and become more open to adoption, said those who work with adoptive parents.

There were 432 adoption applications last year, preliminary figures from the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) showed. This is 15 per cent more than the 375 in 2017.

Last year's figure was also the highest since at least 2010, when there were 325 adoption applications.

About 20 applications a year come from singles. These single men and women include those who are divorced or widowed, the child's step-parent or a relative. Most of the applications by singles were granted by the Courts, said the MSF.

The subject of adoption was raised in Parliament last month when MP for Bukit Batok Murali Pillai asked the MSF how many singles had adopted non-biological children in the past five years and what it was doing to promote the adoption of Singaporean children.

The MSF said in a written reply that there were fewer Singaporean children placed for adoption than there were prospective parents.

The MSF spokesman told The Sunday Times that about 1,000 people attended pre-adoption briefings

each year in the past five years, a number which serves as a proxy for the number of prospective parents.

She said about 30 per cent of the adoption applications in the past five years involved Singaporean children. Slightly more than half of these children were over two years old, with the rest under that age.

Besides the Singaporean children, the rest were mostly babies adopted from Malaysia and Indonesia, said adoption agents.

They said most couples have no gender preference although they want a child of their own race. Some couples prefer Singaporean babies out of concern that a baby from overseas may have been obtained through trafficking.

However, there are simply fewer babies born in Singapore put up for adoption, said social workers, lawyers and adoption agents.

Mrs Jennifer Heng, director of

Safe Place which helps pregnant women in distress, said women who do not want to raise a child usually abort their pregnancies, and those who carry their babies to term usually want to keep them.

There is also more help for single mothers now, and the stigma of being an unwed mother has eased, so more women feel they are able to raise a child on their own, said Ms Mahaletchimi Muthusamy, owner of Ministry of Baby Adoption Singapore, an adoption agency.

For instance, in 2016, children born to unwed parents qualified for the Child Development Account, a savings account that can be used for childcare fees and medical expenses.

With more parents than there are Singaporean babies to adopt, MSF urges prospective parents to consider adopting children who may be abused or whose parents are unable to care for them.

It is not cheap to adopt a child, checks with adoption agents show.

It costs about \$25,000 to adopt a baby from Malaysia or Indonesia. The fees include the medical and hospital bills for mother and child as well as fees for the adoption agent and lawyer. The bill to adopt a Singaporean baby can go up to \$45,000 because medical costs here are higher, agents said.

Beautician Lin Xiu Zhen, 32, and her businessman husband, Ivan Yeo, 34, adopted a baby girl from Malaysia two years ago. The couple, who have been married for seven years, initially wanted to adopt a baby boy due to be born to a Singaporean teenager. But the teenager's boyfriend objected to the adoption after the baby was born and so Ms Lin started looking elsewhere.

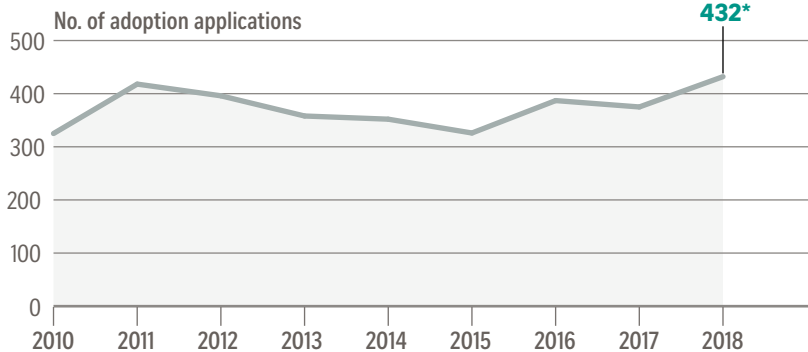
They adopted Zara when she was just a month old.

She said: "My husband was very sure when we first saw her. It was really love at first sight for him."

Ms Lin said Zara, now two, is a well-loved and happy toddler. "She has brought lots of joy to us," she said. "I tell her about adoption but I'm not sure how much she understands. I feel it's better that she hears it (her adoption) from us first rather than find out accidentally. That will be a much bigger shock."

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Numbers up



*Preliminary

Source: MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

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Winning kids' trust and affection

Dr Chiew Yoke Fong and her husband had been married for about 10 years when they decided to adopt a child. Then in their early 50s, they wanted an infant but were advised to consider an older child, who is less physically taxing to raise.

Dr Chiew, a 63-year-old part-time pathologist, and her retired engineer husband, 64, are now parents to two girls, aged 13 and 10.

She said: "Whether she was a baby or not did not matter. At the end of the day, it's how much we put into the relationship."

They adopted their elder daughter when she was six. Her birth parents could not raise her as they are unwell and the girl had been placed with two sets of foster parents before she was adopted.

Dr Chiew said: "I hug her every day and tell her we are her 'forever home' so that she has a sense of security; so that she knows she is not going to be abandoned again."

It took the couple over a year to win her trust and affection.

About a year later, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) asked if they would like to adopt the girl's biological sister, then aged three. They said yes.

The younger girl, who was mal-

nourished, also had fears of abandonment and she threw tantrums when things did not go her way.

The MSF said there are fewer Singaporean children placed for adoption than there are prospective adopters and it encourages couples to consider adopting Singaporean children who have been abused or are unable to be cared for by their birth families.

A ministry spokesman said that adoption is considered only after a comprehensive assessment of the birth parents and extended family members shows they are unable or unwilling to care for the child, or if their care will significantly compromise the child's safety or well-being.

Social workers say it is much harder to find adoptive parents for such children as most couples feel they cannot cope with the abuse, trauma or other problems the children have to grapple with. But there are exceptions.

Touch Family Services senior manager Teo Seok Bee said: "Those who adopt these children usually start from a position of the child's interest rather than their own interest, as in, 'This is a child who needs a family' rather than 'My family needs a child.'"

She told of a couple with three biological children who adopted a girl, five, who had experienced trauma at home. They wanted to give her a loving home, but because of her past, the girl was fearful of being abandoned and threw tantrums.

The adoptive mother sought therapy for her and also learnt how to better manage the child's behaviour. The girl has grown up to be a "fine young lady", said Ms Teo.

Dr Chiew used to take her daughters to visit their birth parents at least once a year until her older daughter asked to stop because she felt uncomfortable during the visits.

Both girls are happy and well-adjusted, Dr Chiew said. "They are not orphans and so we can't cut off their relationship (with their birth parents). And it's also for the biological family to see how the girls are growing up so they don't feel so guilty about placing them for adoption."

"Many are afraid that Singaporean children will run back to their birth parents. But these children realise your love for them and they know their future is better with you. So the likelihood of them going back to their birth family is zero."

Theresa Tan

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Celebrate Marriage with quiz and tips to boost intimacy

Sue-Ann Tan

How in tune are you with your other half? Do you know what his or her life values are, or the names of his or her closest friends?

To find out, you can now take an online quiz as part of the annual Celebrate Marriage campaign launched on Friday by Focus on the Family Singapore to help “young married couples come to a true understanding of their spouse, and promote greater connection and intimacy”.

Besides the quiz, the organisation will share tips and ideas to help couples understand each other's point of view in areas such as money, parenting, sex and intimacy.

The public can also access a series of online coaching videos, featuring marriage experts and family-life educators who share their secrets on how spouses can nurture intimacy and connect both emotionally and physically.

The campaign has helped more than 500,000 married couples annually since it was first launched in 2016.

“Focus Singapore is hopeful that a stronger marriage foundation will help couples gear up for the challenge of parenthood,” Focus on the Family Singapore said in a statement.

In 2017, a total of 7,578 marriages ended in divorce or annulment.

A 2016 Prudential survey also found that about a quarter of married people in Singapore are thinking of divorce. The 500 respondents indicated that children, money, housework and the time spent on mobile phones were the top sources of conflict between partners.

Chief executive of Focus on the Family Singapore Joanna Koh-Hoe said: “Through Celebrate Marriage, we hope to encourage healthier and happier marriages and, by extension, happier children and healthier homes.

“We believe that the best gift parents can give their child is to love their spouse. When spouses build connection and intimacy, they become better partners in parenting and provide a secure home for raising confident kids.”

Mr Gary Koh, marriage solemniser and family-life trainer at Focus on the Family Singapore, added: “From our experiences mentoring couples, we find that many forget we all have different personalities, dreams, habits and opinions that inevitably make it hard to see eye to eye on everything.

“Being intentional about intimacy is important, otherwise we enter drift mode and, unknowingly, the relationship stagnates and things start going downhill.”

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Shedding light on life and legacy of Tan Kim Seng

New book details story of philanthropist and his descendants who supported education here

Melody Zaccheus
Heritage and Community
Correspondent

When the National University of Singapore (NUS) renamed the Angsana residential college in University Town the College of Alice and Peter Tan in 2013, it raised eyebrows over whether an entire college should be named after an “unknown” couple.

NUS declined to say much about the Tans or the sum they had donated even as the debate raged.

But a new book has thrown some light on them. The late Mr Tan actually came from a long line of philanthropists who have contributed to Singapore's education scene since the mid-1800s.

Daughter-in-law Vivienne Tan, 67, who this week is launching the book she wrote about Mr Tan's ancestor – Peranakan pioneer Tan Kim Seng – set the record straight

in an interview with The Sunday Times, saying that some of the furore was unfortunate.

Said Mrs Tan, a retired general manager: “I was hurt for them. The university wanted to name (the college) after the benefactors so they agreed. They didn't ask for it.”

The incident showed how little Singaporeans know about the legacy of the island's pioneers, she said.

She wants to clear the air now that the book, Tan Kim Seng: A Biography, has been written, she said. “We have been philanthropic for many generations. The story of Tan Kim Seng's family is really about education. Tan Kim Seng's legacy continues through charitable acts by his descendants.”

Elaborating, she cited Tan Jia Kim – Tan Kim Seng's grandson, and her father-in-law's granduncle.

Tan Jia Kim, a Straits Settlements Legislative Council member,



Above: First-time author Vivienne Tan at the Tan Kim Seng Fountain with her book on her husband's ancestor.
ST PHOTO: COURTESY OF VIVienne TAN

Left: The National University of Singapore renamed a college after descendants of Tan Kim Seng – Alice and Peter Tan – in 2013.
ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

had petitioned the colonial authorities in 1904 to establish a medical school in Singapore – NUS Medicine (known today as the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine).

Up to that point, Singapore had been receiving doctors who were not trained to handle tropical diseases, from Britain and its colonies.

He raised about \$87,000, which included his personal donation of \$12,000, and is credited for the school's inception.

Some 50 years before, Tan Kim Seng started the first Chinese school in Singapore called Chong Wen Ge in 1849, and the Chui Eng Si E Free School in 1854 to educate Chinese boys.

Mrs Tan embarked on the book project in 2008 to better detail the story of her husband's ancestor. The project was completed last year.

Her motivation was to paint a more detailed picture of Tan Kim Seng, whom most Singaporeans

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

I was hurt for them. The university wanted to name (the college) after the benefactors so they agreed. They didn't ask for it.



MRS VIVienne TAN, on how she felt when the public reacted negatively to the renaming of an NUS residential college after her parents-in-law in 2013.

and even his descendants know about only vaguely from his photographs and portraits, and the road and fountain that were named after him.

A first-time author, the former general manager of investment properties with Centrepont Properties took on the role of narrator in the book, writing it as if she was talking to a friend. She injected her own excitement at freshly unearthed discoveries of Tan Kim Seng's life.

For instance, she was impressed with how he took care of his two daughters in a period when women were subjugated.

His will made sure income from some of his properties would go to his daughters and this was to be free from marital control.

Tan Kim Seng was also described as the facilitator of deals; the go-to person for British or Chinese merchants.

“Various records portrayed him as someone charming, witty and well respected,” said Mrs Tan.

Tan Kim Seng started his spice businesses squatting and haggling with Riau traders by the Singapore River. His business evolved over the years into estate management.

Mrs Tan was also quite taken by his irrepressible sense of humour. In 1852, at his own ball, Tan Kim Seng's guest was recorded as having lost a slipper while dancing vigorously.

“A burst of laughter, which was impossible to restrain, shook the fat

sides of the host at this disaster.”

In November 1857, Mr Tan offered \$13,000 to the colonial authorities to bring enough water to the town.

In recognition of his contributions, the authorities built him a fountain – now standing in Esplanade Park – but squandered his donation on a failed waterworks project.

Mrs Tan said: “When they reached a certain height, the Tans tended to give back to society. They saw gaps and they would do something about it.

“Some generations didn't give as much but there were always reasons. They went through the Great Depression and they lost money. During World War II, everybody lost so they were quiet for a while until they recouped. If they didn't have money, they had talent to give back.”

Mrs Tan expects about 60 descendants of Tan Kim Seng to attend the book launch at NUS University Cultural Centre. Her mother-in-law Alice Tan will be present. Her father-in-law Peter died in 2010.

Mrs Tan said the couple's donation in 2013 aimed to support needy students and academic programmes in the college, as well as in the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, Faculty of Science, NUS Business School and Yale-NUS College.

Mrs Tan, who is married to Professor Walter Tan, medical director of Raffles Hospital, said the book helps add depth to the story of Singapore's early years and is especially timely as the island commemorates its bicentenary.

She noted that Sir Stamford Raffles was here to build his own resume – not to build a nation.

She argued that his genius was in making it a free port, which attracted traders like Tan Kim Seng, who came from Malacca after getting heavily taxed by the Dutch.

“Traders like Tan Kim Seng worked hard, owned businesses and became very wealthy. It is Singapore's story – that we will always seize the opportunities presented to us.”

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Celebrate the Art of Living and Leaving Well



The author, Dr William Wan, General Secretary of the Singapore Kindness Movement, will share his unique insights from his book, **THROUGH THE VALLEY**, on how people can age gracefully.

He will be joined by The Straits Times Senior Correspondent Lee Siew Hua.



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Pompeo to raise Huawei concerns on central Europe visit

US State Secretary to warn against region’s close China ties

WASHINGTON • US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will voice concerns about the growing presence of China’s Huawei Technologies in central Europe when he visits Hungary, Slovakia and Poland next week, a senior US official said, as Washington tries to bolster ties with a region it acknowledges it has neglected.

Mr Pompeo’s visit will be the first by a US Secretary of State to Slovakia in two decades, while the last top American diplomat to travel to Hungary was Mrs Hillary Clinton in 2011.

In Hungary and Slovakia, Mr Pompeo will also discuss ways to bolster security relationships with both countries, including clinching deals on defence cooperation, a senior administration official said in a briefing to reporters about the trip.

Mr Pompeo will travel to Warsaw from Feb 12 to 14 for official talks and to attend a US conference on the Middle East as it tries to build a coalition against Iran and develop a peace plan between the Israelis and Palestinians.

“In Hungary, the Secretary will give particular focus to the role of China in central Europe, and express our concerns about the growing presence of Huawei in Hungary,” said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity on Friday.

He will “urge regional leaders to heed the warnings of countries from Asia-Pacific who have found themselves in difficult straits as a result of working too closely with the Chinese”, the official said.

Huawei Technologies plans to create a European logistics centre in Hungary and boost production capacity there this year. It has also offered to build a cyber security centre in Poland, where last month a Chinese employee of Huawei and a former Polish security official were arrested on spying charges.

The US is trying to persuade countries to avoid Huawei, which is under scrutiny from Western intelligence agencies for its perceived ties to China’s government and the possibility that its equipment could be used for espionage. Huawei has repeatedly denied engaging in intelligence work for any government.

The US was particularly worried about Huawei’s influence in small eastern and central European countries, where it was easy for China to penetrate state systems, the US official said. He said China “sees relatively small countries with a recent history of communism, with signifi-

Huawei Technologies plans to create a European logistics centre in Hungary and boost production capacity there this year. It has also offered to build a cyber security centre in Poland, where last month a Chinese employee of Huawei and a former Polish security official were arrested on spying charges.

cant pathways of corruption, that lend themselves more readily to state penetration in key sectors, and then they have a springboard to operate within EU fora”.

China and Russia’s growing influence in central Europe occurred in part because of a lack of robust US engagement in the past decade, the official said.

Meanwhile in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, the Chinese embassy on Friday denied what it termed “ridiculous” allegations of spying levelled by the Baltic euro-zone state as it joined other Western nations in expressing concerns about Chinese telecoms giant Huawei.

Earlier last week, two Lithuanian intelligence agencies condemned China for an “increasingly aggressive” spy campaign which it said included “attempts to recruit Lithuanian citizens”.

The Chinese embassy said in a statement: “It is absurd and ridiculous for the Lithuanian intelligence and security services to rely on conjecture and imagination to make unfounded distortions.”

It said it was “shocked and surprised” by the “totally unacceptable” statements made by Lithuanian intelligence, insisting that “China does not pose any security threat to Lithuania”.

China has limited economic presence in Lithuania, a staunch US ally of 2.8 million people, but talks are under way regarding investments in the Baltic seaport of Klaipeda, according to local officials.

Occupied and annexed by Moscow during World War II, Lithuania broke free from the crumbling Soviet Union in 1991 and joined the European Union and Nato in 2004.

REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is visiting Hungary, Slovakia and Poland next week in a bid to bolster ties with nations in central Europe.

News analysis

Germany’s free trade agenda under threat as political pressure builds



Markus Ziener

For The Sunday Times
In Berlin

Germany’s policy of advocating free trade and open markets is increasingly under threat, with protectionist practices and political pressure mounting over a range of issues, including the Iran nuclear deal and the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project.

The latest involves Chinese telecommunications equipment company Huawei.

Since it emerged that Germany has been considering Huawei technologies for its critical infrastructure projects, such as the new 5G wireless network, Berlin has been under considerable pressure to rethink its options.

In a blunt warning, US Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland said: “Those who are charging ahead blindly and embracing the Chinese technology without regard to these concerns may find themselves at a disadvantage in dealing with us.”

The comments, clearly aimed at Berlin, were not the first from the United States, which has had Germany in its cross hairs over crucial business decisions.

US Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell has frequently intervened in sovereign economic decisions by the German government, clearly overstepping the boundaries of diplomacy.

On the Iran deal – crafted during then President Barack Obama’s time but abandoned last May by the Trump administration – Mr Grenell has repeatedly sounded warnings that German companies which continue to do business with Teheran will face repercussions.

The other signatories to the treaty – in particular Germany, France and Britain – have been trying to rescue the deal, which sees Iran curbing its nuclear ambitions in exchange for a lifting of trade sanctions.

But the US is not the only party to raise concerns over Huawei and the Chinese technology firm’s alleged use of parts that could allow for Chinese espionage.

Doubts over the Chinese telecoms equipment maker’s intentions come at a time when the EU is considering the introduction of sanctions against companies and countries involved in cyber espionage and intellectual property theft.

European politicians have similarly called for caution when dealing with Chinese companies, citing the Chinese National Intelligence Law of 2017 in particular as proof that in national security matters, Chinese companies cannot be trusted.

“They have to cooperate with their intelligence services,” said European Commission Vice-President Andrus Ansip in December.

“This is about mandatory back doors. I was always against having mandatory back doors,” he added. “It’s about chips they can put somewhere to get our secrets.”

However, in Huawei’s case, there has been no smoking gun so far.

And a few weeks ago, the head of the Federal Office for Information Security, Mr Arne Schonbohm, said that there is no evidence to justify banning Huawei from the infrastructure projects.

There is a lot at stake for Germany.

Direct investment in China by German companies is around €80 billion (\$\$123 billion), while China has strategically invested only €2 billion in Germany.

Although Germany is still exporting most of its products within the EU, China is its third-most important market after the US.

A row over Huawei could risk harming the economic relationship that has become so vital for German industries.

The Chinese government has pushed back hard after a Huawei employee was arrested last month in Poland over spying allegations, and after the company’s chief financial officer was detained in Canada in December for allegedly violating US sanctions in the Iran deal.

During a recent visit to Japan, German Chancellor Angela Merkel left the door open for Huawei to participate in the 5G project.

However, she said China has to make sure that data protection is guaranteed.

The debate over Huawei coincides with the ongoing dispute over the 1,225km Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, which is being built to transfer Russian gas to Germany.

Washington has also heavily intervened, threatening German companies with significant drawbacks if they participate in the project, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of this year.

The US has warned that with Nord Stream 2, Germany and the other European countries will be too dependent on Russian energy supply.

Instead, Washington wants Berlin to buy liquefied natural gas (LNG) that is shipped from the US. Germany is currently in talks over plans for an LNG terminal in the northern city of Wilhelmshaven.

However, American LNG will not be enough to meet gas needs in Germany, which now receives about 40 per cent of its supply from Russia. The pipeline could double the flow of Russian gas into Germany. American LNG is also far more expensive than the gas from Russia.

Germany’s close ally France has also recently questioned Berlin’s decision over the gas pipeline project.

Although France is involved in the consortium that is building the pipeline, Paris has threatened to significantly hamper the project.

But the opposition was really over Germany’s reluctance to go along with French proposals on how to reform the EU, and centred on comments made by German Minister of Economics Peter Altmaier.

Mr Altmaier had last week tabled a protectionist plan for parts of the German industry considered sensitive.

A watershed moment was the acquisition in 2016 of German robot manufacturer Kuka by Chinese company Midea. While the 13,000 Kuka employees did not want to become part of a Chinese company, no German investor was willing to step in.

Mr Altmaier said he regrets that the German state was then unable to buy a majority stake in Kuka – a key company in developing robotics.

He now wants to establish a state investment fund that could invest if private companies do not.

The rise of interest-driven policies, whether in the US or in China, has seemingly led the conservative Mr Altmaier to the conclusion that it is time for the state to take control and a re-examination of Berlin’s liberal economic approach.

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The US is trying to persuade countries to avoid Huawei, which is under scrutiny from Western intelligence agencies for its perceived ties to China’s government and the possibility that its equipment could be used for espionage. Huawei has repeatedly denied engaging in intelligence work for any government. PHOTO: REUTERS

US-China trade talks resume tomorrow

WASHINGTON • United States negotiators are preparing to press China this week on longstanding demands that it reform how it treats American companies’ intellectual property in order to seal a trade deal that could prevent tariffs from rising on Chinese imports.

A new round of trade talks begins in Beijing tomorrow, after the most recent set of negotiations concluded

in Washington last month without a deal and with the top US negotiator declaring that a lot more work needed to be done.

A White House official said last Friday that preparations were under way and the talks would continue to focus on pressing Beijing to make structural reforms.

The White House announced a timeframe for the Beijing talks in a

statement and said lower-level officials would kick off the meetings tomorrow before higher principal-level talks take place on Thursday and Friday. US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He will lead those talks.

Mr Liu, China’s top trade negotiator, had met Mr Lighthizer and Mr

Mnuchin for two days of talks in Washington last month.

Mr Lighthizer, named by President Trump to spearhead the process after agreeing to a 90-day truce in the trade war with Beijing, has been a strong proponent of pushing China to make reforms and end what the US views as unfair trade practices, including stealing intellectual property and forcing US

companies to share their technology with Chinese firms. China has denied it engages in such practices.

The two sides are trying to hammer out a deal ahead of the March 1 deadline, when US tariffs on US\$200 billion (\$\$271 billion) worth of Chinese imports are scheduled to increase to 25 per cent from 10 per cent.

Mr Trump said last Thursday he did not plan to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping before that deadline, dampening hopes that a trade pact could be reached quickly.

“I don’t think either side is ex-

pecting a draft of something next week,” said Ms Erin Ennis, senior vice-president of the US-China Business Council.

Another source, who had been briefed on the talks, said a lot of work also needed to be done on an enforcement mechanism for a potential deal.

“If there’s some indication that they’re making progress on subsidies, forced tech transfer and the constellation of issues there and an enforcement mechanism, that would be interesting,” the source said. REUTERS, BLOOMBERG

Doubts over three more PH politicians’ degrees

2 not named on uni websites; one has MBA from alleged degree mill

PETALING JAYA • Three more politicians from the ruling coalition of Pakatan Harapan (PH) have come under scrutiny after the education credentials of Deputy Foreign Minister Marzuki Yahya were questioned.

A Facebook page, Ops Johor, questioned Johor Menteri Besar Osman Sapien’s education history and alleged that he did not obtain a degree from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) as claimed, The Star Online reported.

It also uploaded a picture to prove that it tried to search for Datuk Osman’s name on the UPM search portal and got nothing.

“The info that Ops Johor received, UPM introduced a Bachelor in Accounts in 1985, when at the time the university did not offer Diploma in Accounts, it had only Diploma in Business Management,” said the post.

Mr Osman, when asked further if the allegation was affecting his image, replied: “It is okay. Even Datuk Marzuki was hit by it.”

Mr Marzuki, whose degree was initially stated on Wikipedia as being obtained from the prestigious University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom through a distance learning programme, later admitted that his degree was actually from the Cambridge International University (CIU) in the US – a suspected degree mill.

Mr Marzuki maintained that he had always said he graduated from CIU, in which he enrolled in 2002, The Star Online reported.



Akamai University in Hawaii, where Mr Paul Yong Choo Kiong obtained his MBA, is said to be a degree mill. PHOTO: AKAMAI UNIVERSITY WEBSITE

“When I was asked by the media, I clearly said that I was from Cambridge International University in the US and not the University of Cambridge in the UK,” he said in a statement last Friday.

Amid calls for his resignation by the opposition Umno party, which questioned his integrity, Mr Marzuki said he will leave it to Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to decide his fate.

But The Star Online said in an editorial yesterday that the “Scambridge scandal” is threatening to bring down the deputy minister.

“The prevailing opinion on social media is that if he cannot be honest about something as simple as his academic background, how

can he be trusted on affairs of state?” it said.

“It has been pointed out that if this was the private sector, the person would have been fired without further ado because it is a question of his credibility and integrity.”

Housing and Local Government Minister Zuraida Kamaruddin’s social science degree from the National University of Singapore (NUS), as reported by the media when she became a minister, has also been questioned.

Twitter user Don Juan deRyezal searched in vain for her name on the NUS online degree verification portal, The Star Online reported.

“Kami gagal menemui carian



Ms Zuraida Kamaruddin denies claiming that she is a graduate from NUS.



Mr Paul Yong Choo Kiong has a degree from Akamai University, which is a suspected degree mill.



A Facebook page alleges Datuk Osman Sapien does not have a degree from UPM.

nama YBM di National University of Singapore. Mungkin tercibir agaknya? (We were unable to find your name in the NUS. Could it have gone missing?)” he wrote.

Datuk Zuraida said in a statement late yesterday: “I have never claimed or held myself to be a graduate of NUS and I have never authorised anyone else to do so.”

Mr Paul Yong Choo Kiong, a Democratic Action Party state assemblyman, counted a Master in Business Administration from Akamai University – an alleged degree mill in Hawaii – among his academic qualifications.

But he said rivals were using the degree mill allegation as an attempt to gain political mileage.

Jaguar Land Rover mulls over finance choices

LONDON • Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), reeling from a US\$4 billion (S\$5.4 billion) writedown, a slump in China sales and uncertainty around Brexit, said conditions are not right for it to borrow from the bond market and that it is seeking alternative funding.

The luxury carmaker needs to raise US\$1 billion within 14 months to replace maturing bonds while feeding an investment programme for electric cars that is burning through cash.

To support its needs, JLR could increase a receivables facility or turn to other bank financing, with further options including leasing assets and tapping export credit, treasurer Ben Birgbauer said in an interview.

JLR’s owner, Tata Motors, shocked investors last Thursday when it revealed the extent of the problems its British arm is having in China. Sales of Jaguar sports cars and Land Rover SUVs dropped 35 per cent in the world’s biggest car market in the nine months to Dec 31, sending the unit to a £273 million (S\$480 million) loss and knocking as much as 30 per cent off Tata stock.

“Market conditions are less favourable in general and our bonds are trading below par, reflecting our recent financial performance,” Mr Birgbauer said. “We have always said we monitor the debt market and look to issue debt when market conditions are more favourable.”

Britain’s biggest carmaker is slashing 4,500 jobs, or about 10 per cent of the workforce, as it responds to slowing sales. That is on top of the 1,500 people who left the company last year. The measures will trigger a one-off charge of £200 million in the current quarter.

One major problem facing JLR in China is an ineffective dealer network, according to a presentation from the British business. Only 18 per cent of outlets are in so-called tier-one cities like Shanghai and Beijing, and more than one-third have been open for three years or less.

The company now plans to overhaul the operation, cutting back on deliveries to reduce stock and investing in measures to boost its brand, logo and slogans.

JLR says it can still grow global sales in fiscal 2020 with the help of other markets and the launch of revamped Range Rover Evoque.

Prior to last week, concerns about JLR’s performance had centred on the impact of Brexit and a government clampdown on diesel-powered vehicles in depressing British car sales.

Royal London Asset Management had already reduced its exposure to JLR in response to “Brexit-specific risks and their ability to maintain access to the financial markets”, said head of global high yield Azhar Hussain. BLOOMBERG

WorldBriefs

China slams Modi’s visit to border state

MUMBAI • China’s foreign ministry yesterday condemned Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the north-eastern border state of Arunachal Pradesh, also claimed by China, saying it “resolutely opposes” activities of Indian leaders in the region.

Mr Modi’s visit was part of a series of public meetings in the region aimed at garnering support for his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party ahead of Indian elections to be held by May.

Despite recent efforts to improve bilateral ties in both countries, disputes over the mountainous Indo-China border – which triggered a war in 1962 – and the region that China claims as southern Tibet have remained a sensitive issue.

REUTERS

Immunise kids against measles, Filipinos told

MANILA • Routine immunisation coverage against measles in the Philippines was only at 55 per cent, although the vaccine is free in government facilities, said Ms Julia Rees of Unicef Philippines.

She urged Filipino parents yesterday to immunise their children amid a measles outbreak that has killed more than 20 children since the start of the year. DPA

Tainted alcohol death toll in India rises to 57

NEW DELHI • The death toll from a batch of illegally brewed alcohol in northern India doubled yesterday as the authorities launched a crackdown, and police and officials were suspended.

At least 57 people have died after drinking the poisonous liquor, suspected of being laced with menthol. The toll on Friday had been 28. The victims, villagers in adjoining districts of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand states, had drunk the tainted liquor on Thursday. DPA



The confiscated drugs that were hidden in two shipping containers with audio equipment bound for Australia. The illicit cargo – with a street value of A\$1.29 billion (S\$1.24 billion) – was seized in California last month after a joint investigation by the Australian and US authorities. After a series of raids, two US nationals and four Australians were arrested last week in Australia. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

US drug bust exposes ties between Mexican cartels, Aussie biker gangs

SYDNEY • The Australian and US authorities announced that they had seized around a billion dollars worth of methamphetamine – or Ice – in a bust that revealed new ties between Mexican cartels and Aussie biker gangs.

The Australian Federal Police said on Friday that a joint investigation led the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement to uncover 1.7 tonnes of drugs in California last month.

The US authorities said the illicit cargo – with a street value of

A\$1.29 billion (S\$1.24 billion) – was hidden in two shipping containers carrying audio equipment bound for Australia.

After a series of raids this month, two US nationals and four Australians were arrested last week in the Melbourne and Sydney areas. They face various charges, including attempting to import illegal drugs, and face maximum sentences of life in prison in Australia if convicted.

The investigation appeared to reveal cooperation between Mexican

cartels and Australian biker gangs, developing what the authorities say is a worrying new vector for drugs to arrive to Australia.

Assistant Commissioner Bruce Hill of the Australian Federal Police said: “This is a serious warning. We now believe the Mexican cartels are actively targeting Australia. They have been sending smaller amounts over the years. This is now flagging their intent. Australia is now being targeted.”

He added, without naming the cartel involved: “The cartel is one of

the most powerful and violent drug trafficking syndicates in the world.”

He also pointed to high Australian street prices and prevalent drug use as a “drawcard” for organised crime.

Colombian and Mexican cartels have long looked to local partners to open new markets for their produce and shift legal risk.

Australian police indicated that the country’s biker gangs, with deep involvement in organised crime, were willing interlocutors.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

AUSTRALIA TARGETED

They have been sending smaller amounts over the years. This is now flagging their intent. Australia is now being targeted.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRUCE HILL, of the Australian Federal Police, on Mexican cartels actively targeting Australia.

Japan govt takes heat over girl’s death as child abuse cases soar

Abe calls for emergency safety review of all suspected victims

Walter Sim
Japan Correspondent

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has called for an emergency review into the safety of all children who are suspected of being abused, as more harrowing details emerge from investigations by the authorities into the death of 10-year-old Mia Kurihara last month.

The move comes as figures last Thursday showed that Japanese police handled 80,104 child abuse cases last year, a significant 22.4 per cent spike from 2017 in the 14th straight year of increase.

Over a period of time, Mia was kicked, beaten, starved, deprived of sleep and made to stand for hours by her father – Yuichiro, 41.

The government has taken heat from many quarters, including the United Nations, over the botched handling of her case.

The authorities had been coerced by Yuichiro to tell him what the girl told her school about the abuse. Mia was also left in his care.

The day she died, her father had subjected her to “punishment” which lasted more than 12 hours – from 10am to 11.10pm, when the police were called in.

Yuichiro, who continues to insist that he was a disciplinarian but not a child abuser, said he called the po-

lice after Mia was knocked out cold during a scuffle while he was punishing her. He was arrested for inflicting bodily harm on his daughter, while his wife, Nagisa, 31, was held for abetting the violence.

At an emergency ministerial meeting on Friday, Mr Abe said: “We cannot regret enough the fact that the school, education board, child welfare consultation centre and other adults could not pick up on a heartbreaking SOS call for help, and act to protect a young life.”

Tokyo wants to confirm the safety of all suspected child abuse victims across Japan within one month, and to reassess whether the necessary steps have been taken for each child.

In the event that their safety cannot be ascertained, the child will be taken into protective custody by a child welfare consultation centre.

The latest National Police Agency statistics show that the number of child abuse cases handled by the police last year topped 80,000 for the first time.

Of these, 57,326 cases involved psychological abuse, such as verbal threats, up 23.4 per cent from 2017.

There were 14,821 cases of physical abuse, up 20.1 per cent.

Another 7,699 children suffered neglect (up 20.3 per cent), while 258 were subjected to sexual abuse (up 2.8 per cent).

Despite the surge in child abuse cases, only in 1,355 instances were the parents or guardians arrested and charged for inflicting harm on



The latest National Police Agency statistics show that the number of child abuse cases handled by the police last year topped 80,000 for the first time. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



children. This indicates a societal preference for families to iron out their domestic issues. There is also a reluctance for the judiciary system to step in, especially in cases which may be hard to prove, such as when external injuries are absent.

Last Thursday, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child called on Tokyo to “prioritise the elimination of all forms of violence against children”, noting “the high level of violence, sexual abuse and exploitation of children” in the country.

Mr Abe and his Cabinet on Friday also pledged to take steps to improve information-sharing and co-ordination across the different authorities and municipalities to prevent cases like Mia’s from falling through bureaucratic cracks.

To beef up its resources, the government plans to add 2,000 more child welfare workers to its current 3,200 by March 2023, though it has been difficult to hire trained experts.

But the Mainichi daily questioned in an editorial last Thursday if such measures were truly sufficient, noting that similar pledges to strengthen coordination have been made in the past.

“A thorough investigation should be carried out to identify problems in the centres, local governments and national government programmes,” it said. “Pouring water

into a bucket with a hole in the bottom cannot protect children.”

Officials from the Kashiwa child welfare consultation centre had sent Mia home after Yuichiro provided a statement ostensibly written by his daughter.

It has since emerged that she had been coerced by her father into writing the statement.

In it, she said: “It is not true that I was beaten by my father. I don’t want to see people from the consultation centre any more, so do not come here.”

On Jan 24, she was found dead in her bathroom.

waltsim@sph.com.sg

Brexit deal can be done, says Ireland’s Prime Minister

DUBLIN/BELFAST • Republic of Ireland Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said he believes “a deal can be done” to avoid a disorderly British exit from the EU, after a meeting with a key ally of British Prime Minister Theresa May that he said went very well.

Later on Friday, Mr Varadkar hosted Mrs May to a formal dinner in Dublin that an Irish official described as “very warm” – in contrast to a relatively chilly reception given to Mrs May in Brussels earlier in the week. Mr Varadkar said talks with Northern Ireland’s Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in Belfast in the afternoon showed that there was “more that unites us than divides us when it comes to Brexit”, unusually conciliatory language in what has often been an acrimonious relationship.

The DUP, which props up Mrs May’s government, has been one of the fiercest critics of Britain’s exit deal with the European Union, which Parliament in London has rejected and more particularly the contentious “backstop” championed by Mr Varadkar.

The provision is an insurance policy meant to keep the border between Ireland, a euro zone member, and the British-run province of Northern Ireland open under any and all circumstances.

The DUP says its terms are unacceptable as they would undermine trade between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

The EU has said it will not remove the provision or re-open the legally binding Brexit deal agreed with Britain over two years, but has said it is ready to re-work the political declaration that accompanies it.

After the meeting, DUP leader Arlene Foster said she had a “good engagement” with Mr Varadkar and that the DUP wanted “to be as helpful as we can to try and get a deal that works for the United Kingdom and also works for the European Union”.

The support of the DUP’s 10 members of Parliament is seen as key to Mrs May’s winning over sceptical members of her Conservative party and securing parliamentary approval for the withdrawal agreement. Asked by Irish state broadcaster RTE how he envisaged a deal could be done between Britain and the EU after weeks of stalemate, Mr Varadkar cited the common ground between the Irish government and the DUP. Both sides, he said, want to avoid a hard border in Northern Ireland, ensure Britain left with a deal and enable frictionless trade.

“Often when you share all the major objectives, it is possible to come to a solution,” Mr Varadkar said.

“I think that, on balance, we will secure a deal – whether it will be by the end of March or after an extension, I can’t say,” he added.

Speaking ahead of his dinner with Mrs May, Mr Varadkar said the meeting was aimed at seeing “confidence and trust restored”. An Irish official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the meeting would not involve any formal negotiations, which are being led by Brussels. REUTERS



Genoa dismantles bridge that collapsed in storm half-year ago

GENOA • Engineers have started the delicate task of taking apart Genoa’s Morandi motorway bridge, almost six months after its partial collapse during a storm killed 43 people and injured dozens.

Thousands of tonnes of steel, concrete and asphalt have already been removed from the spectacularly

truncated high-rise bridge in the northern Italian port city to make it lighter before the “deconstruction” operation began.

“It’s an important day, the first step on a path that we hope will be as short as possible,” Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte told journalists at the site on Friday.

“The new bridge will be up by the end of the year.”

Four powerful strand-jacks positioned on the bridge by an enormous crane began unhooking and slowly lowering a 36m-by-18m concrete slab weighing nearly 1,000 tonnes. The jacks are the same as those used to right the Costa Concordia cruise liner off Tuscany in 2013 after it ran aground and capsized, leaving 32 dead.

Yesterday, the vast slab was slowly lowered to the ground, some 48m below, after a diamond chain saw cut through the entire bridge in two places.

The giant slab will be used as a counterweight for removing other pieces before the bridge’s towers are demolished with dynamite.

The operation will help the city move on from the disaster on Aug 14 last year when part of the bridge collapsed, sending dozens of vehicles and tonnes of concrete tumbling to the ground.

Italy’s most famous living architect Renzo Piano, a Genoa native who helped design the Pompidou Centre in Paris, has provided the design for the replacement bridge that “will last for 1,000 years”.

While the new structure has been designed to look different from the old one, opened in 1967, it will feature 43 lamp poles in memory of those killed.

It is expected to be open to traffic by April 2020, with the demolition of the old structure due to take 190 days. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Demolition works at Morandi motorway bridge in the Italian port city of Genoa yesterday. Part of the bridge collapsed during a storm last August, killing 43 people. PHOTO: DPA



Bruce McArthur in a photo posted on his social media account. He has pleaded guilty to killing and dismembering eight men from 2010 to 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Toronto’s Gay Village serial killer jailed for life

Activists now want to know if police response was slowed by homophobia and racism

TORONTO • For years, members of Toronto’s gay community warned that there was a serial killer on the loose, that vulnerable men were going missing, that the streets were not safe. They were right.

On Friday, Bruce McArthur, a 67-year-old landscaper and former mall Santa Claus, was sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole for 25 years on eight counts of first-degree murder, ending a trial that shocked a city – and a country – that likes to see itself as inclusive and safe.

McArthur was accused of killing and dismembering eight men between 2010 and 2017, hiding seven of the corpses in planters and the eighth in a ravine.

He pleaded guilty last month.

Ontario Superior Court Justice John McMahon said McArthur would likely never be released. “The ability to decapitate, dismem-

ber his victims and do it repeatedly, is pure evil,” he said.

At a sentencing hearing that ended on Tuesday, Canadians heard how McArthur lured and murdered men he met in Toronto’s Gay Village, then posed corpses in costumes, keeping pictures of each victim in labelled digital folders.

They learnt that he was stopped when police raided his home, finding a man tied to a bed. He was a potential ninth victim, the court heard, and McArthur had a folder waiting.

In a city that prides itself on being gay-friendly and welcoming to new Canadians, McArthur sought out men marginalised by their sexuality, ethnicity, immigration status or poverty. Most of his victims were refugees or immigrants. Several struggled with substance abuse. Some had not revealed that they were gay.



A mural in the Gay Village area of Toronto, where Bruce McArthur met his victims. McArthur, a landscaper and former mall Santa Claus, was stopped when police raided his home and found a man tied to a bed, a potential ninth victim. PHOTO: NYTIMES

In a city that prides itself on being gay-friendly and welcoming to new Canadians, McArthur sought out men marginalised by their sexuality, ethnicity, immigration status or poverty. Most of his victims were refugees or immigrants. Several struggled with substance abuse. Some had not revealed they were gay.

long-time advocate for the victims and their families, praised the team of detectives that caught McArthur, but expressed anger that it seemed to take the murder of a white man, Mr Kinsman, to spur action.

“This is a real wake-up call for

Canada,” Mr Vijayanathan said.

Toronto’s Gay Village is a couple of blocks of shops, restaurants and bars in the heart of the city. It was there, in the early 1980s, that police raids on bathhouses spurred Canada’s gay rights movement.

McArthur was a regular in the area. Mr Kyle Rae, Toronto’s first openly gay city councillor, recalled seeing him around. “He was a fixture,” he said.

The first victim to go missing was Mr Navaratnam, a refugee from Sri Lanka. He was last seen leaving a village bar in September 2010. In December that year, Mr Faizi, originally from Afghanistan, vanished. By 2012, Mr Kayhan, also an immigrant from Afghanistan, was gone.

The disappearances sparked an investigation called Project Houston, and officers interviewed McArthur. Eventually, the effort was disbanded. The killing resumed.

In 2016, McArthur was interviewed a second time after a man claimed McArthur had tried to choke him. Detectives did not press charges. The officer who handled

that case, Sergeant Paul Gauthier, now faces professional misconduct charges.

The break in the case came in June 2017, when Mr Kinsman, a white, Canadian-born activist with deep ties to the community, went missing. By July, Project Prism was launched to look into his disappearance and another recent case.

Many in the community say they were convinced a serial killer was on the loose, an idea the police dismissed about a month before McArthur was caught.

“We follow the evidence, and the evidence is telling us that that’s not the case right now,” Toronto Police Chief Mark Saunders told reporters in December 2017.

Mr Rae, the former city councillor, said the resistance to believing there could be a serial killer reflected the city’s need to believe it was safe. “This is part of the culture of Toronto and Canada. We are ‘Toronto the good’. That can’t happen here. But this type of murder can happen here,” he said.

WASHINGTON POST

Lieutenant-Governor Justin Fairfax denies two allegations of sexual assault – in 2000 and 2004.



Governor Ralph Northam vows to stay on after admitting that he painted his face black for a school yearbook.



Virginia office holders face calls to quit over racism, rape scandals

RICHMOND • Virginia’s embattled governor, Dr Ralph Northam, capped a week of political chaos ignited by racial scandals by vowing last Friday to stay in office, while the fellow Democrat in line to succeed him faced a second accusation of sexual assault.

The swirling racial scandals, involving both Dr Northam and the state’s Democratic attorney-general, and the sexual assault accusations against the lieutenant-governor have stirred fears about political fallout at both the state and the national levels.

Lieutenant-Governor Justin Fairfax, 39, issued a statement denying both allegations and called them a “coordinated smear campaign”. He said the latest accusation, that he had raped a fellow student at Duke University in 2000, was “demonstrably false” and declared that he would not step down.

He insisted earlier this week that his encounter with a woman who has accused him of forcing himself on her sexually at a hotel in Boston in 2004 was entirely consensual.

But last Friday’s accusation sparked a round of calls for his resignation, and even the threat of impeachment.

If Dr Northam, Mr Fairfax and Attorney-General Mark Herring are all forced to resign it would mean that the next in line to become governor would be a Republican. That possibility has tested Democrats’ resolve to show zero tolerance for sexual

misconduct and racial bigotry.

It also has stirred Democrats’ concerns that political discord in Virginia, a key swing state in presidential elections, could flip back into the Republican column in the 2020 White House race.

The upheaval began with the revelation on Feb 1 that Dr Northam’s medical school yearbook page contained a racist photo. That was followed by separate admissions from Dr Northam, 59, and Mr Herring, 57, that each had darkened their faces during the 1980s to imitate black performers, a practice widely considered to be racist.

After a week hunkered down in virtual seclusion under mounting pressure to resign, Dr Northam indicated in an e-mail message on Friday to state employees that he planned to keep his post.

“You have placed your trust in me to lead Virginia forward – and I plan to do that,” he said.

In a separate statement responding to the latest allegation against him, Mr Fairfax said he has “never forced myself on anyone ever” and demanded a “full investigation into these unsubstantiated and false allegations”.

He had briefly seemed poised earlier this week to succeed Dr Northam to become the second African-American governor in Virginia’s history. But the latest allegation of rape brought a torrent of demands for him to quit. REUTERS

Annual check-up shows Trump in ‘very good health’

WASHINGTON • US President Donald Trump’s personal physician said last Friday that the President is in “very good health” and should remain so “for the remainder of his presidency and beyond” after Mr Trump underwent a comprehensive physical examination at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center outside Washington.

But Dr Sean Conley, a navy officer who is the President’s physi-

cian and the current director of the White House medical unit, released no details about what a team of 11 specialists had found in the course of a four-hour examination of Mr Trump.

Dr Conley said “reports and recommendations are being finalised”, but did not say if, when or in what form, they would be released publicly.

Last year, after Mr Trump’s first

full examination as president, the White House took the unusual step of having Dr Ronny Jackson, the President’s then physician, deliver a lengthy report in the White House briefing room and then, answer questions from reporters.

Dr Jackson was widely ridiculed for using excessive language in describing the President’s health.

“It’s called genetics,” Dr Jackson had said. “I told the President if he had eaten healthier over the last 25 years, he might live to be 200.”

Dr Jackson also said at the time that Mr Trump had requested a cognitive function screening test and had performed well.

Dr Conley did not say last Friday whether he repeated the test this year.

Periodic medical exams for the president are a tradition that goes back decades, and historically, presidential check-ups tend to buoy whatever image the president has presented about his health.

The doctors who examined Mr Trump last Friday, whose areas of expertise were not detailed by the White House, were working to detect signs of improvement or cause for concern in areas publicly detailed by Dr Jackson last year.

While Dr Jackson referred to the President’s “excellent” condition last year, he had also laid out a few health goals for him, including reducing Mr Trump’s weight and lowering levels of what is commonly referred to as bad cholesterol.

Among the open questions was whether Mr Trump was able to shed 4.5kg to 6.8kg from his weight last year, when it was reported to be 108kg – just below the official label of obesity – on his 1.9m-tall frame. NYTIMES

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41% of whooping cough cases are infants

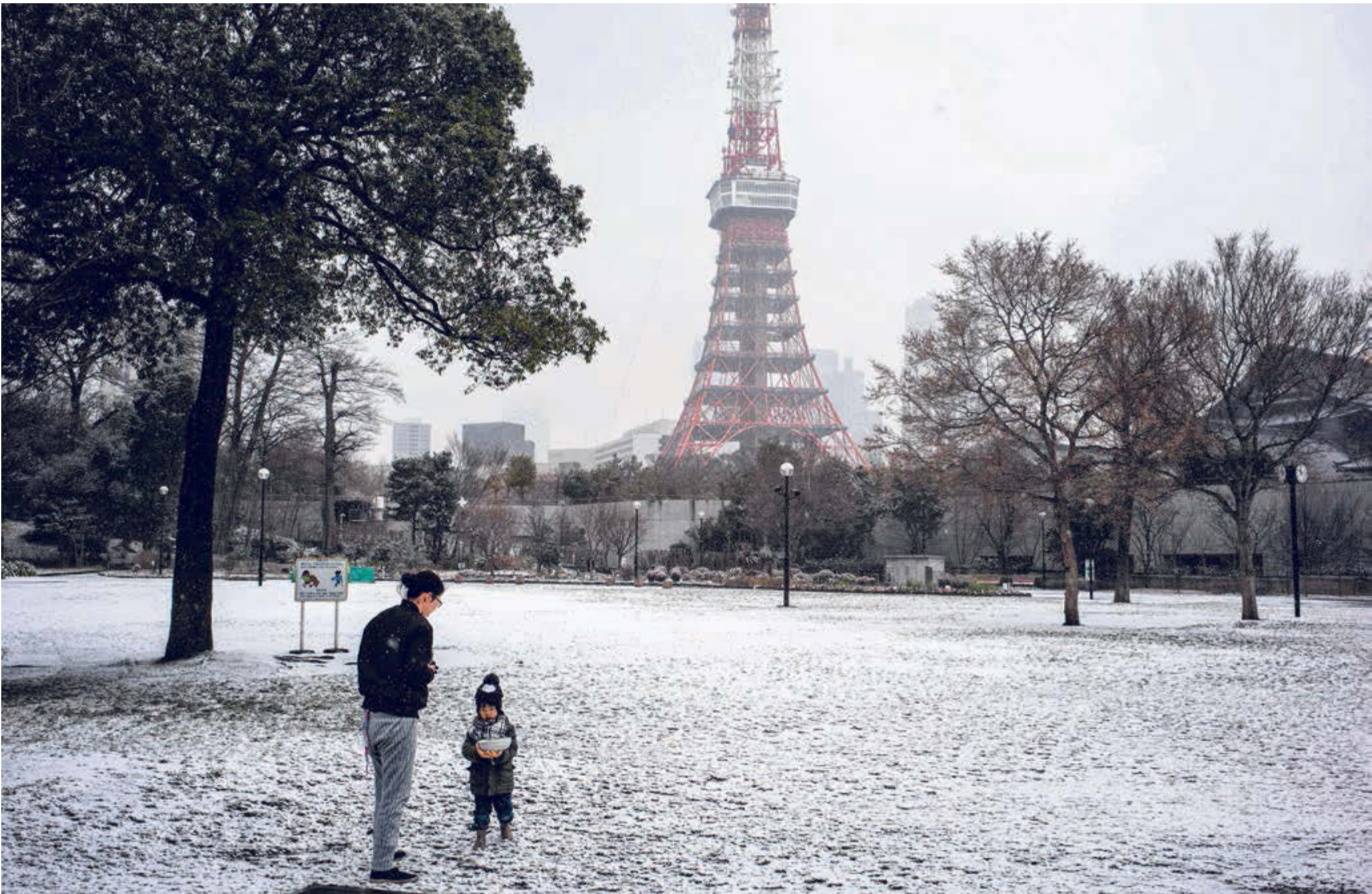
Pertussis on the rise

StClassifieds

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Tokyo's Shiba Park being covered in snow yesterday. The Japan Meteorological Agency had said earlier that a strong cold front and a passing low-pressure system might combine to dump snow across wide areas of Japan throughout yesterday. The agency has predicted that as much as 5cm of snow may accumulate in central Tokyo's 23 wards by 6am today. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Snow delays, cancels flights at Tokyo airports

Cold snap follows two days of unseasonal warmer weather

Walter Sim
Japan Correspondent
In Tokyo

Two days after central Tokyo experienced unseasonal 17 deg C heat, a rare snow day yesterday caused snarls to its transport networks. The cold snap caused 157 domestic flights to and from Tokyo's Haneda and Narita Airports to be cancelled, a tally by public broadcaster NHK showed as of 7pm.

More than 20,000 travellers were affected. Delays of up to two hours were reported at Haneda Airport, while at least one runway was closed at any one time at Narita Airport for snow clearance. While Tokyo usually experiences snow at least once every winter, it typically melts quickly rather than accumulate on the ground. The Japan Meteorological Agency had said earlier that a strong cold front and a passing low-pressure system might combine to dump snow across wide areas of Japan throughout yesterday. But it lifted heavy snow warnings by the early afternoon yesterday. The agency has predicted that as

much as 5cm of snow may accumulate in central Tokyo's 23 wards by 6am today. Throughout the Kanto region, which encompasses the Greater Tokyo area, 10cm of snow was expected in Tochigi, 8cm in Ibaraki and Chiba, and 5cm in Kanagawa, south of Tokyo. As at 6pm yesterday, 16 people were sent to hospital after falling on slippery roads, NHK said. The snow comes two days after the unseasonal heat last Thursday, which the agency said was typical of mid-April and about 10 deg C higher than the average temperature for this month. The warmth, the agency said, was due to a rising

warm air front from the south. It urged people to monitor closely transport disruptions as train services have typically been curtailed by delays on heavy snow days. Meanwhile, Japan's northernmost Hokkaido shivered through its coldest day in 40 years on Friday, when its capital, Sapporo, recorded a daytime high of minus 10.1 deg C. It was the first time in four decades that the mercury had breached minus 10 deg C, and news pictures showed visitors to the Sapporo Snow Festival wrapping themselves up in thick jackets to protect themselves from the biting winds as "feels like" temperatures plunged to about minus 20 deg C. The weather agency said this was due to a cold air mass with a record low temperature of minus 24.4 deg C that was flowing in over Sapporo at an altitude of 1,500m. Other Hokkaido municipalities also saw frigid conditions. In Rikubetsu town, the mercury plunged to minus 31.8 deg C, the first time this winter that temperatures have fallen below minus 30 deg C.

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Australia

Thousands without power as storm lashes Sydney

SYDNEY • Thousands of Sydney homes were without power yesterday after severe storms hit Australia's largest city, causing transport hold-ups, inundating vehicles with flood water and delaying a national football match. Heavy rain and lightning storms lashed parts of Sydney late on Friday, with close to 60mm of rain falling in some areas. In Sydney's west, which experienced some flash flooding, one suburb saw nearly 42mm fall in a short downpour lasting just 30 minutes. "It was a slow-moving storm with that warm humid air moving along the coast... that allowed for that increase of moisture," Mr Byron Doyle from the New South Wales Bureau of meteorology told the Agence France-Presse. Images of cars submerged in flood waters on main roads, broken traffic lights and fallen trees circulated on social media. Energy companies reported that more than 40,000 customers were affected by power outages at the peak of the storm overnight, with more than 5,000 still without

power early yesterday. Emergency services fielded over 1,000 requests for assistance, including nine flood rescues in the Sydney area. The rescues were "all for vehicles in flood water", said a New South Wales state emergency services spokesman. Flights were delayed at Sydney's airport, while the storm caused havoc on some of the city's train lines. The start of a national Australian rules football women's match was delayed twice, pushed back 45 minutes as heavy rain and lightning pummelled the oval. Several light towers then went out mid-match during the live television broadcast, temporarily stopping the game during a reported blackout. The Sydney storm comes as recovery efforts continue in Australia's flood-ravaged north-eastern state of Queensland, which over the past week has seen record-breaking rainfall, forcing hundreds of evacuations and thousands of requests for help. Extreme heatwaves during the southern hemisphere summer have also led to temperature records being broken in some towns. Eastern inland areas have been experiencing a severe drought, while firefighters in the country's southern states have been recently battling bush fires. High temperatures are not unusual in the Australian summer, but climate change has pushed up land and sea temperatures and led to more extremely hot days and severe fire seasons, scientists say. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

In Sydney's west, which experienced some flash flooding, one suburb saw nearly 42mm fall in a short downpour lasting just 30 minutes.

New Zealand

NZ village 'in hands of God' as bush fire threatens houses

WELLINGTON • An entire village of more than 3,000 people has been evacuated in New Zealand as a huge bush fire threatened houses, and firefighters said they were "in the hands of God". A state of emergency has been declared around the town of Wakefield as the fire, which has been raging across the parched countryside

in the Nelson region at the top of the South Island, moved within 10km of residential area. It had swept across about 2,100ha of mainly bush and pine forest since erupting in the tinder-dry rural district last Tuesday. The regional police commander, Mr Zane Hooper, confirmed yesterday that "the orderly evacuation of

Wakefield" had been successfully completed, while fire chief John Sutton said the critical danger point could come today. "I'm worried about tomorrow, to be honest," Mr Sutton said yesterday. "We are in quite a good place strategically today, but we are in the hands of God when it comes to the wind. If we have winds that are anywhere near 50kmh today, we're in trouble." Helicopters being used to fight the fire had at times been diverted to douse other flare-ups in the region, including one on tree-covered hills bordering Nelson city which is home to about 50,000 people. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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Daily News

新明日報

食就民俗
深厚久远

日月明
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\$311,000 (\$444 ppq)

Up by \$7,000 (2.3%) over last quarter

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\$2,100 (\$3.00 ppq)

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my Rental Yield

8.10%

Up from 7.8% last quarter

my Capital Gain

-\$27,000 (-7.9%)

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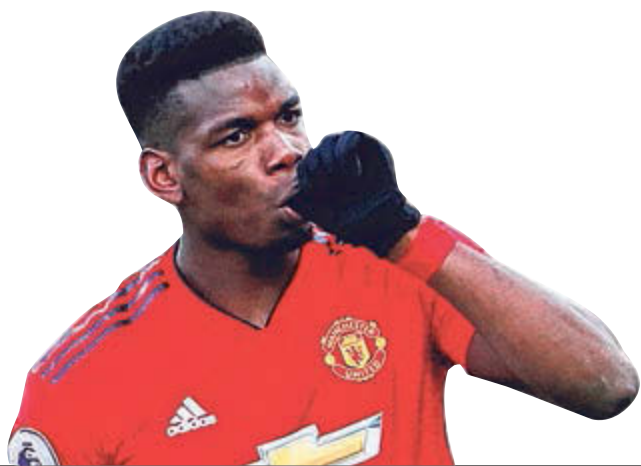
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Sport



Pogba on the double
Man United warm up for Tuesday's PSG clash with easy EPL win at Fulham.
A25



Remy Ong, 40, a triple gold medallist at the 2002 Asian Games, runs the National Service Resort and Country Club Bowling Academy with a business partner. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

A CHALLENGING PATH FOR SPORTS ACADEMIES

Many are attracting interest, but face space issues, high overheads and tough competition

Wang Meng Meng

Former national thrower Wan Lay Chi was passionate about athletics when she was an active athlete. Six years after calling it a day, she remains as keen as ever, so much so that she is now banking money and her future – and not just sweat and time – on the sport.

Last month, she established her own track and field school for children aged four to 11 called Team WanSportsAcademy. So far, 10 children have signed up for training, which costs \$200 for a 2½-month term programme.

It is a small step for a young academy but the 2011 SEA Games shot put silver medallist, who retired in 2013, sees reason to plough on despite the risk of failure.

She said: “There’s definitely a big challenge... At the end of the day, it depends on the parents.

“Do they look at the amount per session or do they look at what their kids get at the end of the day?

“It’s also up to us and how we market it. I’m confident in what I’m doing, this is my passion and I always follow it. I think it’s time to invest in my passion and see how far we can go.”

She is not alone. Several former national athletes have also found that opening their own sports academy can be a viable – if tricky – business.

REPUTATION COUNTS

Like Wan, former national athlete The Sunday Times spoke to revealed that while it can be challenging to set up their own academy, their businesses can survive if they can deliver quality coaching.

Bowler Remy Ong, a triple gold medallist at the 2002 Asian Games, opened the National Service Resort and Country Club Bowling Academy two years ago with a business partner.

He banks on his group of 10 coaching staff, who include former national coach Adam Chew, his son Faizal, a former national player, and Nicholas Sit, a national associate coach, to provide expert guidance to their trainees.

Since then, he has secured deals to coach schools such as Anglo-Chinese School (Primary), Tanjong Katong Girls’, Maris Stella Primary, Saint Andrew’s Junior College, Singapore Polytechnic and Nanyang Technological University, on top of individual and group classes for members of the public.

The 40-year-old revealed that his academy does not rely on marketing to draw new students in, saying: “Just like the queue at a kopitiam (coffeeshop), if you have quality, the customers will come. News of how good your stall is will spread by word of mouth.

“We are growing at a rapid speed, we just added three new schools this year. You cannot

teach if you are not experienced as a competitor or a coach.

“We have knowledge to share, that’s why people believe in us and come to us.”

Likewise, national basketballer Wong Wei Long opened Scholar Basketball Academy in 2015 and has seen his enterprise grow from its inaugural intake of 12 students to 200 now, charging them \$50 for every two-hour session.

He also employs 24 coaches, including current national teammates Larry Liew and Russel Low.

The 30-year-old, who plays for Indonesian club CLS Knights, said: “I noticed that local parents are now more willing to spend on their kids to give them a chance of succeeding in sports. They want their children to follow people like national athletes who are successful and learn not just skills but also character and values.”

Last year, Jensen Hiu, who established his own school, Advantage Tennis, came out of retirement to play in the Davis Cup after hanging up his racket 13 years earlier.

The 38-year-old, who coaches at 10 schools and provides individual classes alongside his staff of 15 coaches, said: “Reputation (as a former national player) helps, especially when it comes to convincing parents.

“Last year (when he returned to competitive tennis), I received publicity. That helped with good vibes in the academy and probably inspired the students to play more.”

CONSTRAINTS

While their medals, achievements and experience are plus points for prospective sign-ups to consider, these local sports academies face hurdles as well.

Ex-national golfer Poh Eng Wah, 55, established Poh Bros Golf Management in 1995 with his siblings – brothers Eng Huat, Eng Soon, Eng Toon, sister Serene, and cousin Emma.

It has a few thousand students,

who pay \$480 for 10 hours of coaching for a group of four.

But, he says, finding a suitable training location can be difficult.

Eng Wah said: “It is getting harder to run a golf academy because the Government has decided to close down a number of golf courses and ranges.

“We were affected when Toa Payoh Golf Range was closed and we had to move our operations to the Mandai Executive Golf Course.

“Our lease for Mandai runs out in 2021 and we don’t know what will happen next, so that is quite unsettling.”

Eng Wah is not alone in encountering an uphill climb in sourcing for a training venue.

Former Olympic swimmer David Lim started Swimfast Aquatic Group 24 years ago and continues to face rising rental costs.

His academy, which has over 1,000 students, is one of the most successful on the scene, having produced national swimmers such as Tao Li, Amanda Lim, Samantha Yeo and the Quah siblings – Ting Wen, Zheng Wen, and Jing Wen.

“I basically funded everything myself, and put in about \$40,000, which was big in 1995,” he revealed.

“It’s so hard to own a pool in Singapore because land is expensive, so we had to figure out rental. Throughout the years, the cost has escalated. I pay about four times more than what I did in 1995 for rental.

“While for coaches, a good coach in 1995 would be paid \$3,000 (a month), whereas you offer one \$7,000 or \$8,000 today and they might only consider the offer.

“The overheads for running an academy are high, and it is certainly not as lucrative as a tuition centre, for example.”

COMPETITION FROM ACTIVESG

Competition not only looms in the form of rival academies but also in the national sports movement, ActiveSG, which runs a series of affordable and popular classes for

the public and offers a wide range of sports, including athletics, badminton, basketball, football, tennis, martial arts, floorball, and hockey.

Wan said: “It’s definitely challenging because ActiveSG is heavily subsidised.

“All we need is to get the parents to try our programme and to see whether they like it or not and decide on the difference between ours and theirs.

“At the end of the day, we still have to remember that we’re just trying to promote this sport.

“Maybe there’ll be some talented kid that can fly our flag high in the future and it’s good to have healthy competition. I’m very confident in my programme. All we need is to get people to come for a free trial.”

LOOKING LONG TERM

Mindsets can be a problem too. Former Olympic swimmer Ang Peng Siong, who runs the APS Swim School, which trains over 1,000 athletes, said: “In Singapore, many parents do not believe that their child can make a career in sports. Therefore, hiring local swim teachers and swim coaches can be a challenge.”

APS Swim School, which has groomed the likes of national para-swimmers Theresa Goh and Toh Wei Soong, has 15 full-time staff and a pool of swim teachers to service its programmes.

But, regardless of the obstacles, the outlook for sports academies is still a positive one, as Ang observed: “Since 2000, we have seen a growth in the sports industry with the Coss (Committee On Sporting Singapore) initiatives and recommendations.

“Sports can be a multi-billion dollar industry in Singapore if the blueprint is designed to help it grow. There is so much potential. We are still in the infancy stage.”

The academies

ATHLETICS

TEAM WAN SPORTS ACADEMY

ATHLETE
Wan Lay Chi, retired national thrower

PROGRAMMES
From basic to elite level and private coaching.

MORE INFO
zavisports.wixsite.com/teamwansportsacademy

BASKETBALL

SCHOLAR BASKETBALL ACADEMY

ATHLETE
Wong Wei Long, national basketballer, CLS Knights Indonesia player

PROGRAMMES
From Learn to Play to competitive training, group training, private classes

MORE INFO
www.scholarbasketball.com

BOWLING

NSRCC BOWLING ACADEMY

ATHLETE
Remy Ong, retired national bowler

PROGRAMMES
From Schools’ Learn to Bowl to Competitive (centre of excellence).

MORE INFO
AOS300300@gmail.com

GOLF

POH BROS GOLF MANAGEMENT

ATHLETES
Poh family – Eng Wah, Eng Huat, Eng Soon, Eng Toon, Serene, Emma

PROGRAMMES
From tee to green onwards. Individual and group classes, rates vary depending on group size.

MORE INFO
www.golfers.sg/poh-brothers

SWIMMING

APS SWIM SCHOOL

ATHLETE
Ang Peng Siong, retired national swimmer

PROGRAMMES
From Learn To Swim to Competitive (under Aquatic Performance Swim Club).

MORE INFO
www.apsswim.com / www.apsc.me

SWIMFAST AQUATIC GROUP

ATHLETE
David Lim, retired national swimmer

PROGRAMMES
From Learn To Swim to Competitive.

MORE INFO
www.swimfast.com.sg

TENNIS

ADVANTAGE TENNIS

ATHLETE
Jensen Hiu, retired national player

PROGRAMMES
Schools, individual classes (basic, intermediate, advanced).

MORE INFO
www.meetup.com/Advantage-Tennis

four-digit draw

Feb 09 2019

First 5439

Second 5427

Third 9997

STARTERS

0161 0853 1453

1936 4652 5454

7038 7043 8800

9726

CONSOLATIONS

0358 1843 3197

3246 3641 3661

4826 8136 8225

8551

Liverpool back in the lead



Mohamed Salah scoring his 17th Premier League goal of the season to put Liverpool three up against Bournemouth two minutes after the break at Anfield yesterday. Sadio Mane opened the scoring after 24 minutes and Georginio Wijnaldum doubled the lead 10 minutes later as the Reds regained their swagger after two 1-1 draws, with Leicester and at West Ham. The 3-0 win took them to 65 points, regaining the summit from Manchester City who host Chelsea today. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

BACK IN TOP 4 AND IT ‘FEELS GREAT’

United’s resurgence continues as Fulham fans blast Ranieri after another listless showing

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Fulham 0
Manchester United 3

LONDON • Fulham were the perfect opponents for a team hoping not to expend unnecessary energy before facing Paris Saint-Germain. Manchester United did not have to be at their dashing best yesterday to continue their resurgence under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, but they still could have scored a hatful as they regained a spot in the top four of the Premier League for the first time since the opening weekend of the season.

They settled for a 3-0 win in the end and Solskjaer was able to keep Marcus Rashford and Jesse Lingard on the bench before United welcome PSG to Old Trafford for the first leg of their last-16 Champions League tie on Tuesday night.

A brace from Paul Pogba and a sensational solo goal from Anthony Martial were enough for the Premier League’s form side, who have picked up 25 points from nine games since replacing Jose Mourinho with Solskjaer in December.

Pogba later fired a warning to the chasing pack that they intend “to stay there”, adding: “It feels great. That’s what we wanted, since Ole came, the top four.

“We have big games coming up, so it won’t be easy. But we put in a good performance as a team.

“When we need three points, we

get the three points. But these big games coming up will determine where we end up. I feel great, the team feels good.”

While United’s supporters revelled in watching the legendary figure in the dugout mastermind another victory, Fulham’s fans booed Claudio Ranieri down the tunnel after the final whistle.

The odds are against the team with the worst defensive record in the division, with 58 goals conceded, pulling off a miraculous escape given that they are seven points adrift of 17th place with 12 games remaining.

Craven Cottage, normally such a genteel place to watch a game of football, was an angry place with fans aiming chants of “You don’t know what you’re doing” at a manager who appears to have run out of ideas after three months in the job.

Curiously, it was the wind, which made the ball move weirdly in the air, and not their opponents that took United a while to get used to.

But it was not long before Pogba decided it was time to take charge in the middle of the park. The France midfielder’s authority on the ball settled his teammates and it soon became clear United had a plan to get Martial running at Denis Odoi.

Pogba has been involved in 13 league goals under Solskjaer, scoring eight and creating five, and he eased United ahead with a powerful strike in the 14th minute.

In the 23rd minute, Martial produced a moment of magic in keeping with United’s scintillating counter-attacking traditions. The forward started his run just inside his own half as he ignored Odoi’s at-



tempts to bring him down, shim-mied past Maxime Le Marchand and opened up his body to curl a lovely shot into the far corner.

They added another when strong work from Romelu Lukaku led to Le Marchand bringing down Juan Mata just inside the box.

Pogba dispatched his penalty with aplomb and United spent the final 25 minutes keeping their powder dry for PSG.

Solskjaer said that while there was a chance his tinkering could have backfired, his footballing philosophy was “if you don’t risk, you don’t win”.

The Norwegian said: “I have to trust the players, I didn’t feel there was a problem playing any of them.” THE GUARDIAN

EYES ON THE PRIZE

We have big games coming up, so it won't be easy. But we put in a good performance as a team. When we need three points, we get the three points.



PAUL POGBA, Manchester United midfielder, looking ahead to the coming run of tough fixtures that will likely determine his team's final position at the end of the season.

Manchester United’s French midfielder Paul Pogba watching his shot hit the back of the net for the opening goal against Fulham at Craven Cottage yesterday. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

YESTERDAY

Fulham 0 Man United 3
Crystal Palace 1 West Ham 1
Huddersfield 1 Arsenal 2
Liverpool 3 Bournemouth 0
Southampton 1 Cardiff 2
Watford 1 Everton 0
Brighton v Burnley
Late kick-off

TODAY

Tottenham v Leicester
Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, 9.30pm
Man City v Chelsea
Ch102 & Ch227, 11.55pm

TOMORROW

Wolves v Newcastle
Ch102 & Ch227, Tuesday, 4am

LONDON • Tottenham’s bid to gazump Manchester City and Liverpool to the Premier League title suffered a blow, after manager Mauricio Pochettino admitted it would be “tough” for the club to move into their new stadium this season.

Spurs are committed to playing at Wembley until March 2, when they host Arsenal in the north London derby, after which they have five league games left in the campaign.

While Spurs had hoped to open their 62,062-capacity ground on Sept 15 against Liverpool, they were forced to delay its opening after issues with the critical safety sys-

tems. The delays have helped to push up the cost of the facility to more than £850 million (\$\$1.4 billion).

At his press conference ahead of their home league game against Leicester today, he said: “My gut feeling (is that it is not ready), but I hope and I wish to be in the new stadium playing.

“My wish, my hope and my dream is to finish this season playing in the new stadium. We’ll see if you can trust more in my gut or the capacity to finish the stadium before the end of the season.”

Although Spurs have a deal to use

Wembley for the rest of the term, fans have increasingly shown their reluctance to attend the venue.

The 29,164 attendance in the 2-1 win over Watford on Jan 30 was their lowest of the season.

Pochettino said that he understood their frustration, revealing he also wanted to leave Wembley as soon as possible.

The Argentinian said: “The people are going to be disappointed to play at Wembley, not because they don’t like Wembley – we all love Wembley – but because we expect to already play in our new stadium.

“Did you see the last few games

how many people were there? 30,000. I want to play in front of 60,000 – not 30,000.

“The 60,000 people in the stadium always help you to achieve three points and, for the fans, it’s going to be a massive boost. That’s going to translate to the team.”

The 46-year-old also voiced his unhappiness at the league for not being more accommodating ahead of the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie at home to Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday.

The German Bundesliga leaders have an extra day of rest as they played their league game against

Hoffenheim yesterday, which Pochettino called “a massive disadvantage”.

He told the BBC: “We are not receiving help. The Premier League must care about teams involved in the competition.

“In another country like Spain, Germany, France, clubs involved (in the Champions League) can be helped – the league is going to help you arrive in the best condition.”

THE TIMES, LONDON

TOTTENHAM V LEICESTER

Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, 9.30pm

BigMatch

LIVERPOOL WON'T BUCKLE: GUARDIOLA

Despite Reds dropping points recently, City boss expects them to be in title race till the end

LONDON • Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola does not believe Liverpool's recent stumbles in the Premier League title race have been the result of mounting pressure applied by his side.

While Liverpool will still have a game in hand after this weekend's round of matches, back-to-back league draws against Leicester and West Ham have allowed the champions right back into the race.

But at a press conference ahead of today's league game with Chelsea at home, the City boss felt the Reds were not going to buckle and would "be there till the end".

He said: "Liverpool are exceptional, I don't have the feeling (that there are nerves), (Jurgen) Klopp, Virgil van Dijk (don't) feel the pressure, (Roberto) Firmino, (Mohamed) Salah, (Sadio) Mane.

"I feel they play good and try to win the games, (so) we have to be there to win our games."

Such is the embarrassment of riches at his disposal that he will have the luxury of recalling Kevin de Bruyne against his former club today, after leaving the player on the bench at Everton in midweek.

Although de Bruyne came on late to set up Gabriel Jesus' second goal in their 2-0 win, Guardiola is wary of overplaying his side's Player of the Year last season after two long injury layoffs this campaign.

Asked whether de Bruyne, 27, would again be named as a substitute, he confirmed "it was quite possible" before hinting that the

player, who has started only four league games this term, had dropped down the pecking order.

He added: "At the end, we judge the players for who they are, but they are there to perform.

"There are times when teammates are in better condition. In football, what you have done in the past, you have to do again in future.

"We try to control the players, he played the last two. At Everton (on Wednesday), a few minutes, I want him to play as much as possible.

"He went out for five minutes and he was incredible. I want him to sustain that for a long time. When you're out a long time, I don't want him playing game, game, game."

Aymeric Laporte is expected to continue to deputise at left-back against Maurizio Sarri's men today, as first-choice Benjamin Mendy has played just 27 minutes of football since Nov 11.

Guardiola conceded that it could yet be some time before Mendy, who also spent most of last season on the sidelines, returns to full match fitness.

The 48-year-old said: "He's injured, it's not easy, (the) meniscus (issue). He needs to re-adapt, it's not that if you start training in two days you are fit, he has to handle the effort we are putting on him – he has to be careful."

Mendy had nearly earned Guardiola's ire after the 24-year-old put up an Instagram post indicating he was in Hong Kong, despite telling his manager he was going to Paris.

While he later clarified on Twitter it had been a joke, he continued to post memes of his whereabouts and a picture yesterday, which apparently indicated he was in Dubai.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

MAN CITY V CHELSEA
Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, 11.55pm



Kevin de Bruyne (right) and Bernardo Silva (left) congratulating Gabriel Jesus for scoring Manchester City's second goal in their 2-0 win over Everton on Wednesday. De Bruyne is not guaranteed a start against Chelsea today. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

HeartOfFootball

The ref should be seen and not heard, nor make headlines



Rob Hughes

No two clubs in the history of English football have spent more, or won more, in the post-Manchester United era, than the billionaires of Chelsea and Manchester City.

And when they meet at the Etihad this evening, we must hope that the result is determined by players, and not by the man in the middle.

Maybe Gonzalo Higuain, the forward Chelsea have just taken on loan from AC Milan, will lead his team to a rare home-and-away double over City?

Maybe Sergio Aguero, whose strike rate for City is without peer, will score again.

If all their teammates are still on the pitch at the final whistle, then at least football should be the winner.

Why question that basic aspect of

the sport?

Because, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, the referee for this game happens to be Mike Dean. And Mr Dean has a habit of making his own headlines.

He took to the whistle at 17, an age when most boys of his age in The Wirral, near Liverpool, might have aspired to playing rather than officiating the game.

Dean is 50 now, and his fitness is tour de force. A referee runs on average 10.8km in a top-flight game, and has to have eyes everywhere and a sharp mind to make decisions and communicate with 22 players, even those who might be calling him blind.

He is the judge on the field. His verdict is final (at least until the Video Assistant Referee sitting in a TV studio hundreds of miles away overrules him).

But Dean sees himself as the

special one among whistlers. He has taken charge of 472 games in the Premier League, a record.

He has brandished 99 red cards and 1,712 yellow, again records.

And once the statisticians reckoned that he is one shy of his 100th sending-off (and that the two teams he has issued the most reds to are City and Chelsea), there are bookmakers and lampooners taking odds on the moment he reaches that landmark.

To date, he has been even-handed: nine red cards to the light blues of City, nine to the darker blues of Chelsea.

There have been managers in the past who readily took touchline bans and fines for giving their opinions on Dean. Arsene Wenger once knocked down the door of his sanctuary, the referees' room, and called him dishonest.

Dean's revenge on that was to do

what refs traditionally never do. He gave the media chapter and verse of the altercation, and his report to the Football Association ensured that the veteran Gunners boss was sanctioned and silenced.

Hopefully, I've written enough to ensure that Mr Dean's night in Manchester will pass, as we used to say, with the referee being seen but not heard. Anonymous unless provoked, keeping those cards in his pocket.

The game deserves to be taken on its merit. The managers, Pep Guardiola and Maurizio Sarri, are friends and mutual admirers from the day that Guardiola watched the so-called "Sarri-ball" style when the Italian was in charge of Napoli.

They had their famous lunch in Milan with the doyen of football coaches, Arrigo Sacchi, the first man to satisfy AC Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi's lust for a team that could conquer Europe playing football that was beautiful as well as effective.

This evening, they are rivals, and rather a lot rides on the game. City need the points to stay competitive with Liverpool. Chelsea need to prove to their absent owner Roman Abramovich, to do something unusual in his

tenure and give a manager another season to embed his approach.

Apart from the incredible Leicester City championship in 2016, the title has been won in alternate years by City or Chelsea.

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SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS

Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Sun, 10 Feb 2019				
A League	Melbourne Vict	Perth Glory	2.00pm	LW
Spanish League	Leganes	Real Betis	7.00pm	LW / SB
Italian League	Bologna	Genoa	7.30pm	LW / SB
English League Champ	Norwich	Ipswich	8.00pm	LW / SB
English Premier	Tottenham	Leicester	9.30pm	LW / SB
Italian League	Atalanta	SPAL	10.00pm	LW / SB
German League	Werder Bremen	Augsburg	10.30pm	LW / SB
Spanish League	Valencia	Sociedad	11.15pm	LW / SB
Dutch League	Utrecht	PSV	11.45pm	LW / SB
Mon, 11 Feb 2019				
English Premier	Manchester City	Chelsea	12.00am	LW / SB
German League	Dusseldorf	Stuttgart	1.00am	LW / SB
Italian League	Sassuolo	Juventus	1.00am	LW / SB
Spanish League	Sevilla	Eibar	1.30am	LW / SB
Italian League	Milan	Cagliari	3.30am	LW
Spanish League	Athletic Bilbao	Barcelona	3.45am	LW

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Hopefully, I've written enough to ensure that Mr (Mike) Dean's night in Manchester will pass, as we used to say, with the referee being seen but not heard. Anonymous unless provoked, keeping those cards in his pocket. The game deserves to be taken on its merit... It is, or it should be, a players' game.



stsports@sph.com.sg

DO TEAMS STILL NEED ICONIC CAPTAINS NOW?

With the armband rotated at many EPL teams, the need for one totemic leader is on the wane

LONDON • About a decade ago, The Wall Street Journal writer Sam Walker had the idea of trying to identify the most objectively great teams in sporting history, and seeing if he could discern any common traits.

He found they all shared a single characteristic – for every team, the duration of their success coincided with the lifespan of a captain, who could elevate a team to perform beyond the level of their natural ability, from Hungary’s Ferenc Puskas to Carles Puyol of Barcelona.

In short, he theorised the one thing the greatest teams have in common is great player leadership.

Walker’s findings provide an interesting counterpoint to an inconspicuous but intriguing trend of this Premier League season.

At many teams, the club captain has been an impermanent or peripheral figure.

Gary Cahill has barely played for Chelsea, likewise, Everton’s Phil Jagielka, and Southampton’s Steven Davis, now on loan to Rangers.

Manchester United’s Antonio Valencia and Manchester City’s Vincent Kompany have started five and six league games respectively.

Seven clubs (Arsenal, the Toffees, Fulham, City, United, Newcastle and the Saints) have had four or more captains this term.

All of which begs a question: Is the ever-present, totemic captain an endangered species? And does it matter?

The first thing to point out is that there does not appear to be an obvi-

ous correlation between consistency of captain and success based on the small sample of this league season.

City do not appear to have suffered for rotating the armband.

In fact, it is easy to disparage the importance attached to captaincy as old-fashioned – a peculiarly English hang-up.

When pundits – usually from the generations of retired former players – bemoan the lack of leaders in modern football, it feels like they are often harking back to that monolithic figure of English folklore.

The blood-soaked Terry Butcher, or Captain Marvel Bryan Robson, or John Terry or Tony Adams shouting and pointing fingers.

But Nigel Winterburn, who played under Adams at Arsenal, says that the presence of an old-school skipper in the ranks was not something he or his teammates considered a particularly important factor in their success.

“It didn’t give us anything extra,” the former England defender says.

“I never really worried who was captain, it didn’t interest me.”

When Winterburn moved to West Ham, the captaincy was less consistent unlike at Highbury, yet he “didn’t personally notice the difference”.

Is the lionisation of a single captain out of step with the reality of modern football then, a prehistoric obsession in an era of advanced analytics and player rotation?

As Michael Cox pointed out in an article for ESPN on Arsenal’s per-

ceived lack of leaders in 2016, every generation thinks it had better leaders.

As early as 1938, then Gunners boss Herbert Chapman was lamenting: “Football today lacks the personalities of 20 or 30 years ago.”

A lack of leadership is often a retrofitted criticism applied to underperforming teams, while teams that succeed, despite lacking archetypal leaders, escape censure.

However, it would be wrong to say the idea of captaincy is something that is incompatible with the analytical side of modern football.

It is possible that the cult of the captain has seemingly declined in parallel with the rise of the cult of

the coach.

The advent of meticulous micro-managers such as City’s Pep Guardiola and Liverpool’s Jurgen Klopp, whose coaching depends in large part on intensively rehearsing movements and systems, ensures their teams are never unsure of what to do in any phase of the game.

It seems there has also been a change in the type of player considered for the captaincy.

In the past, that office was usually the preserve of vocal, charismatic, defensive players.

But a new breed of captain has begun to emerge. This season, Arsenal’s Mesut Ozil, David Silva at City and Fulham’s Tom Cairney have worn the armband in the league.

These are all attacking players, most of the individualistic variety, none especially loud.

But Winterburn, who was captained by Joe Cole in his final season at West Ham, believes they can do the job.

“You don’t always need vocal captains,” he says. “You can lead by example as a creative player. If the likes of (Chelsea’s Eden) Hazard or Silva are picked as captains, for me, that’s a sign that those guys should be able to inspire the team.”

While Winterburn still prefers the single-captain model, he adds, “There should be 11 captains out there.”

It seems that is the way we are heading but by rotating the captaincy, are you multiplying leadership or spreading it more thinly?

Therein lies the paradox – with 59 players and counting having skippered a league team this season, is captaincy in decline? Or is it in fashion? THE TIMES, LONDON

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

You don't always need vocal captains... You can lead by example as a creative player. If the likes of Hazard or Silva are picked as captains, for me, that's a sign that those guys should be able to inspire the team.

”

NIGEL WINTERBURN, former Arsenal defender, on how individualistic attacking players can break the archetype of the vocal and defensive captain.



A new breed of captain has begun to emerge in the Premier League this season. This includes attacking players such as Arsenal’s Mesut Ozil, seen here talking to teammate Stephan Lichtsteiner. David Silva at Manchester City and Fulham’s Tom Cairney have also worn the armband. PHOTO: REUTERS

Families want search for missing pilot to continue

LONDON • The families of footballer Emiliano Sala and David Ibbotson have urged British authorities to continue to search for the missing pilot.

Sala’s body was recovered on Wednesday from the wreckage of the plane that plunged into the English Channel on Jan 21, but Ibbotson remains missing after the search was terminated due to bad weather.

Yesterday, his family launched a fundraising campaign to find his remains.

“As a family we are relying on the kindness of the good hearted people to help us raise the much needed funds to help us find our beloved Dad, Husband and Son,” the GoFundMe page said.

In a statement released on Friday, Sala’s family had also said they were “hoping that the authorities

will do their best to find him”.

The campaign aims to raise £300,000 (\$527,000). If successful, it would mean the tragedy has sparked three hunts. The first one ended on Jan 24, before a second, privately-funded one began.

Cardiff, whom Sala signed for in a club-record £15 million (\$26.3 million) transfer just two days before his doomed flight from Nantes to the Welsh capital on Jan 21, have of-

fered to pay for the repatriation of his body to Argentina.

Club manager Neil Warnock said: “It brings the family peace and offers them comfort.

“When I spoke to (his sister) Romina, she couldn’t let it go. I wouldn’t have been able to let it go. To start that up (the online crowdfunding campaign to engage the services of shipwreck hunter David Mearns) as they did and (to) get such a response is amazing.”

Bluebirds owner Vincent Tan said the club “have offered to... arrange to take Emiliano back to rest with his family in Argentina. Even though he will be there, his soul will always be in our hearts”.

An inquest into the tragedy is likely to open next week.

THE GUARDIAN, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Weekly tweetbits

CAUGHT ON CAMERA

“I know I should get cracking, but I just want to receive more red packets. #ChorSam” Does Malaysian mixed doubles specialist shuttler Goh Liu Ying intend to switch to “single”? **WATCH:** goo.gl/wKqMnQ

HOT SHOT

“HUAT was I doing? Here’s wishing everyone a happy and prosperous Chinese New Year, Huat Max! #sengdipity” Ex-national sprinters Poh Seng Song and Dipna Lim-Prasad get in on the New Year greetings.

THE STATE OF THE LAKERS

RIGHT NOW

MEME-ORABLE

The LA Lakers get the Distracted Boyfriend meme treatment after LeBron James’ attempts to trade his teammates for Anthony Davis. He did not succeed.

SWEET TWEET

“Nala is waiting for you too...” Weeks after the plane carrying Emiliano Sala went missing, his dog Nala was still waiting by the doorstep for his return. Nala’s wait will never end.

PHOTOS: INSTAGRAM/GOHLIUYING, SENGSONG, TWITTER/KUNGFU_SHAQ, FACEBOOK/ROMINA.SALA.79

MICKELSON'S INSIDE TRACK TO JOINT LEAD

He credits familiarity with poa annua greens for helping him to a 68 to add to opening 65

SAN FRANCISCO • California native Phil Mickelson feels his intimate knowledge of poa annua greens will give him a distinct advantage as he chases a 50th career victory at the Pebble Beach Pro-Am.

The five-time Major winner added a four-under 68 at Spyglass Hill, one of three host courses, to his opening 65 at Monterey Peninsula as he grabbed a share of the

lead on Friday after a rain-hit second round.

He was in the clubhouse on 10 under, alongside fellow Americans Lucas Glover (66), Scott Langley (69) and England's Paul Casey (64).

Jordan Spieth, the 2017 champion, was at 10 under through 16 holes when play was suspended for the day due to heavy rain.

Spieth, seeking a first victory

since his 2017 British Open triumph, ignited his round with five birdies in his first seven holes at Spyglass. He then posted nine straight pars before his day was halted at his 17th hole.

The four-time Major winner was among 44 players who recommenced their rounds yesterday.

Mickelson, a four-time winner of the event, teed off on the 10th and raced to six under for his round with six birdies in his first 14 holes.

But he dropped three shots in succession at Nos 6, 7 and 8, his 15th, 16th and 17th holes of the day, be-

fore closing with a birdie.

He later credited some solid putting and his familiarity with the course's greens for bailing him out, saying: "That's a big adjustment for a lot of guys, seeing how the ball rolls on that particular grass and adjusting to the soft conditions."

"But growing up here, you get used to it and figure it out."

"It was nice to birdie the last, but I hate finishing the round off like that – three bogeys after having a pretty good round going in."

"I guess to make one on the last – that was a long, tough hard hole

that's usually a driver, 8- or 9-iron, and I had to whistle a 4-iron in after a good drive."

"It was just a little bit more difficult conditions today, so I'm lucky to get done now and get the round. Guys unfortunately are still out there playing in some tough stuff."

The 48-year-old has 49 wins around the world, including 43 on the US Tour, with his most recent triumph coming at the WGC Mexico Championship last March.

Casey, who is chasing a third PGA Tour win, cut a swathe through the field, jumping nearly 30 spots after his round at Monterey Peninsula.

The 41-year-old teed off at the 10th and produced four birdies and an eagle in a six-hole span. He also made one more birdie coming home and completed his round moments before the siren sounded to halt play.

He said: "The three blasts means it's bad conditions, but you can finish the hole and I'm like, 'We can finish the hole?' I've never been so happy. I went from upset to happy in an instant."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

SportsWorld

Ormsby two ahead of Steiger at Vic Open

GEELONG • Australian Wade Ormsby remained on course for his second European Tour win after carding a two-under 70 in the third round to move to 15 under at the Vic Open yesterday, two shots ahead of compatriot Matthew Steiger (65).

The pioneering tournament, which is co-sanctioned by the European Tour and the LPGA Tour, is the only one in the world with male and female fields, playing in alternate groups on the same course and for equal prize money.

In the women's tournament, American Kim Kaufman clung to a two-shot lead over France's Celine Boutier (69) and Australian Oh Su-hyun (74) despite shooting a three-over 75 for a total of 10 under.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Monfils serves his way past Tsitsipas

SOFIA • Gael Monfils won 93 per cent of points on his first serve as he reached the semi-finals of the Sofia Open on Friday with a 6-3, 7-6 (7-5) win over Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas.

The Frenchman, who has slipped to 33rd in the world rankings after a series of injuries, has yet to drop a set this week.

Italy's Matteo Berrettini also mounted a comeback to upset Fernando Verdasco of Spain 4-6, 7-5, 6-4, claiming a second famous scalp after upsetting Russian Karen Khachanov earlier in the tournament. REUTERS

Beckham's statue a first in MLS

LOS ANGELES • Former England captain David Beckham will become the first Major League Soccer (MLS) player to be honoured with a statue.

It will be unveiled outside the Los Angeles Galaxy's stadium before their season opener on March 2, the team said on Friday.

Beckham, who is the owner of expansion side Inter Miami, which is set to join the MLS next year, won back-to-back championships with the Galaxy from 2011-12. REUTERS



Phil Mickelson putting on the second green during the second round of the Pebble Beach Pro-Am at Spyglass Hill on Friday. He was happy with his "solid putting". PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

beIN not renewing F1 deal because of beoutQ

DOHA • Formula One is searching for a broadcaster in the Middle East and North Africa after beIN Sports decided not to renew its five-year contract, in a setback to the motor sport's owner Liberty Media.

The Qatari-owned TV network walked away on Friday not only because of disappointing viewing figures, but also because of rampant piracy in the Gulf region.

Tom Keaveny, beIN Media Group's managing director, said the broadcaster had, for nearly two years, warned of the commercial

impact of piracy after paying huge sums for media rights.

In an indirect swipe at F1, he said beIN will now pay less for rights that cannot be protected, "in particular to the rights holders who pay only lip service to combating BeoutQ".

Accusing beoutQ, a Saudi Arabian-based network, of infringing its rights, he said in a statement: "A rights holder's stance on beoutQ's piracy – in other words, whether they're taking legal action, making a public stand, and doing every-

thing within their power to combat the industrial-scale theft of their rights – is a critical factor that we now consider when bidding."

BeoutQ emerged in 2017 after Saudi Arabia and its allies launched a diplomatic and trade boycott of Qatar, accusing it of supporting terrorism, which Doha denies.

While the Saudi government has denied having any links to beoutQ, claiming it is committed to fighting piracy, its channels are distributed online and over the Arabsat satellite network based in Riyadh.

BeIN's 2014-19 deal for F1 live broadcast rights was worth US\$30 million (\$\$40.7 million) to US\$40 million a year, according to those with knowledge of the terms.

According to media analyst Richard Broughton from Ampere Analysis, that figure represents as much as 7 per cent of F1's estimated broadcast income and it was difficult to see another regional broadcaster stepping in to bid the sums that beIN was paying.

He said: "Gulf operators are under intense pressure at the mo-

ment from piracy and poor consumer receptiveness to paying high monthly fees for content."

Although the sport said last June it would "take appropriate action" against intellectual property infringement of its content in the Middle East and North Africa, it appears not enough was done to assuage beIN.

An F1 spokesman said in response to the announcement it was in the late stages of finalising arrangements with a new licensee for the region. BLOOMBERG, REUTERS

Davis helps Pelicans win with 32 points in his first game after layoff

NEW ORLEANS • With deadline day come and gone, Anthony Davis knows the only way he can set himself for a summer trade out of New Orleans is by maintaining his career-high 29.4 points per game for the rest of this National Basketball Association season.

And the want-away player picked up where he left off, with 32 points, to lead the hosts to a 122-117 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves after being booed during the introduction and every time he touched the ball early on.

Friday's performance was all the more impressive as the 25-year-old sat out the entire fourth quarter, again demonstrating why the Los Angeles Lakers, the New York Knicks and the Boston Celtics are all vying for his signature.

That was why the six-time All-Star, whose three-week absence had been a combination of a finger

injury and a freeze-out over his uncertain future, had been desperate to get back to "playing the game that I love".

He even won over the boo-boys; he was applauded off the court after making 11 of 15 field goals and 10 of 11 foul shots, while grabbing

73%

Anthony Davis' field-goal percentage as he sank 11 of 15 shots on his return against Minnesota.

nine rebounds and blocking three shots in just under 25 minutes.

He was surprised that the fans, who felt betrayed by his trade demand, had initially turned on him.

He added: "It was definitely awkward but it doesn't bother me. I was ready (to even play the final 12 minutes). I'm going to be here the rest of the year."

"My job is to play basketball and that's all I want to do."

Pelicans coach Alvin Gentry, however, indicated that while Davis would be returning to the line-up, he had to be properly managed after his injury layoff.

He said: "I was not going have him, first game back, play 38-40 minutes. That's why he didn't go back in the game."

"(Davis) played well when he was in there. We'll figure out his minutes as we go along."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

Curry's best served last



Stephen Curry saved 10 of his 20 points for a fourth-quarter rally that helped the Golden State Warriors overtake hosts Phoenix Suns for their 11th consecutive National Basketball Association win. Friday's 117-107 setback was the Suns' 13th straight loss, despite leading by 17 points in the first quarter and 94-88 with 8min 35sec left. Klay Thompson led the Warriors with 25 points and Kevin Durant added 21. Kelly Oubre (25 points) and Deandre Ayton (23) paced the Suns. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

BASKETBALL

ABL Malaysia Dragons v Macau Black Bears (StarHub Ch202, 2.30pm), S'pore Slingers v Saigon Heat (OCBC Arena, Ch201, 4pm).

CRICKET

3rd & final T20 Int'l New Zealand v India (Singtel TV Ch123 & StarHub Ch236, 3pm).

FOOTBALL

English Premier League Tottenham v Leicester (9.30pm), Manchester City v Chelsea (11.55pm) – Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227. Spanish LaLiga Leganes v Betis (6.55pm), Valencia v Sociedad (11.10pm), Sevilla v Eibar (tomorrow, 1.25am), Bilbao v Barcelona (tomorrow, 3.40am) – StarHub Ch213.

GOLF

European Tour Vic Open: Day 4 (StarHub Ch204, 9am).

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

UFC 234 Whittaker v Gastelum (Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208, 11am).

TENNIS

Fed Cup Q-final: Czech Rep v Romania, day 2 (Singtel TV Ch116 & StarHub Ch210, 8pm).

TOMORROW

FOOTBALL

EPL Wolves v Newcastle (Ch102 & Ch227, Tuesday, 4am).

For latest updates, go to singtelv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

Fitness



HotBods

Text and pictures by Jasmine Choong



Jeff Huang, 27
Fitness manager

Height: 1.85m Weight: 80kg

Exercise regimen: I am a traditional weights person. I split my training into body parts and work them hard, four to five times a week. I include steady-state cardio and also running as I participate in many obstacle races, such as Spartan Race and Tough Mudder. You need to be strong and fit in all aspects to complete them.

Diet: I do not like fried or oily food and will eat them only occasionally. I go for a balanced meal with meat, vegetables and pasta. Ice cream waffles are my go-to whenever I want to celebrate or need a mood-booster.



Elise Teo, 32
Freelance fitness trainer and yoga instructor

Height: 1.51m Weight: 44kg

Exercise regimen: I plan my training around my schedule, so there is no fixed day for any type of training. Each week, I usually fit in four sessions of weight training, targeting different muscle groups, three high-intensity interval training (HIIT) sessions and daily yoga for a balanced regimen. When I have no time for the gym, I will go for 5km runs around the neighbourhood or do body-weight HIIT at home.

Diet: I've been on a pescatarian diet (vegetarian diet that allows for seafood consumption) since I was 18. I try to make my own meals, ensuring there are enough greens every day. I've also been on intermittent fasting the last three years. I love my carbs and don't shy away from chocolates and cakes, but eat them in moderation. I believe in sustainable eating habits that keep me happy.

SCAN AND WATCH
Hot bods videos and more:
[instagram.com/straits_times](https://www.instagram.com/straits_times)



STEP UP IN YOUR OWN HOME OR OFFICE

Studies show that even three 20sec bouts of climbing stairs can improve fitness up to 12%

NEW YORK • As little as 20 seconds of brisk stair climbing, done several times a day, might be enough exercise to improve fitness, according to a pragmatic new study of interval-style training.

The study finds that people can complete a meaningful series of in-sta-workouts without leaving their office building or even changing out of their dress shoes, offering hope – and eliminating excuses – for those of us convinced that we have inadequate time, expertise, income or footwear to exercise.

By this point in February, many of us have begun to waver on our New Year's fitness resolutions, often blaming jammed schedules for our neglected workouts.

Such perceived time constraints have fuelled interest in exercise that is short but strenuous, substituting intensity for duration.

These types of workouts, structured as interval sessions, consist of brief spurts of high-intensity exercise, such as 20 seconds of all-out pedalling on a stationary bicycle, interspersed with periods of rest.

Much has been written about the science behind high-intensity interval training, or HIIT, which indicates that even a minute or so a day of hard effort can increase endurance and improve many aspects of health, including blood pressure and blood-sugar control.

But typical high-intensity interval workouts, in practice, are lengthier and less convenient than many of us might hope.

They typically require time to reach the gym or running path, change, warm up and shower, in addition to the exercise.

Recognising these drawbacks, exercise scientists at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, who have been noodling in their labs for years with different types and lengths of HIIT workouts, began to consider how best to simplify and shorten intense training so it could be doable for most people but still be effective.

Stair climbing emerged as one option. Clambering up a stairwell demands physical effort but little planning, travel or cost, since most office buildings contain stairs.

In 2017, the scientists published their first relevant study.

It showed that sedentary women who completed three, 20-second bouts of climbing stairs – performed in one session with several minutes of rest between the climbing – increased their fitness to about 12 per cent after six weeks.

But that workout still required about 10 minutes or so of uninterrupted time, which, though truncated, might be difficult for some people to tuck into a workday.

So, for the new study, which was published this month in Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism, the researchers decided to see whether it was feasible to break the workout into a series of “exercise snacks” spread throughout the day.

Their hope was that a single quick

burst of stair climbing would be strenuous enough to prompt improvements in fitness if it were repeated multiple times, even with hours in between.

To find out, they recruited 24 healthy but inactive college students, tested their endurance and leg power using a specialised stationary bicycle, and randomly assigned them either to continue with their normal lives as a control group or start exercise snacking.

The exercisers reported to the physiology building's stairwell.

There, the researchers directed them to warm up with a few jumping jacks, squats and lunges and then hurry up 60 steps – three flights of stairs – as quickly as they could, one step at a time, while using the guardrail for safety. These ascents lasted about 20 seconds.

And that was the workout. The volunteers repeated these abbreviated exercise snacks twice more that day, usually at lunch and again in the afternoon, for a total intense exercise time of about a minute.

By the end of six weeks, the exercisers had increased their aerobic fitness about 5 per cent. They also showed improvements in leg power and could generate more power while cycling.

These results suggest that intermittent, quickie stair climbing can be an effective workout, says Martin Gibala, a professor and chairman of kinesiology at McMaster University and the study's senior author.

“We had wanted to make interval training as easy and convenient as possible while still providing enough physical stimulus” to actually improve fitness, he says.

Of course, this snacking approach to intervals did not elevate fitness as much as the single sessions of repeated stair climbing that he and his colleagues had examined earlier, he says.

It also is not clear from this experiment whether and how the widely spaced intervals might affect people's blood pressure and other measures of health, including appetite and weight, and also whether older people or those who are in shape would similarly benefit.

“This was a small, proof-of-concept study,” Gibala says. He and his colleagues plan to conduct larger, longer-term studies of the effects of differing amounts of and approaches to stair-climbing and other interval workouts.

“We are not suggesting that this type of exercise can or should replace all other physical activity,” he continues. “But it is one possible way for people who think they are too busy to work out to fit exercise into their lives.” NYTIMES

Participants in a stepper event at the National Stadium. Closer to home and at your convenience, you can introduce a little difficulty into your annual National Steps Challenge by taking the stairs instead of the lift. PHOTO: SINGAPORE SPORTS HUB

AN ALTERNATIVE

We are not suggesting that this type of exercise can or should replace all other physical activity. But it is one possible way for people who think they are too busy to work out to fit exercise into their lives.



MARTIN GIBALA, professor and chairman of kinesiology at McMaster University and the study's senior author, on intermittent, quickie stair climbing being an effective workout.

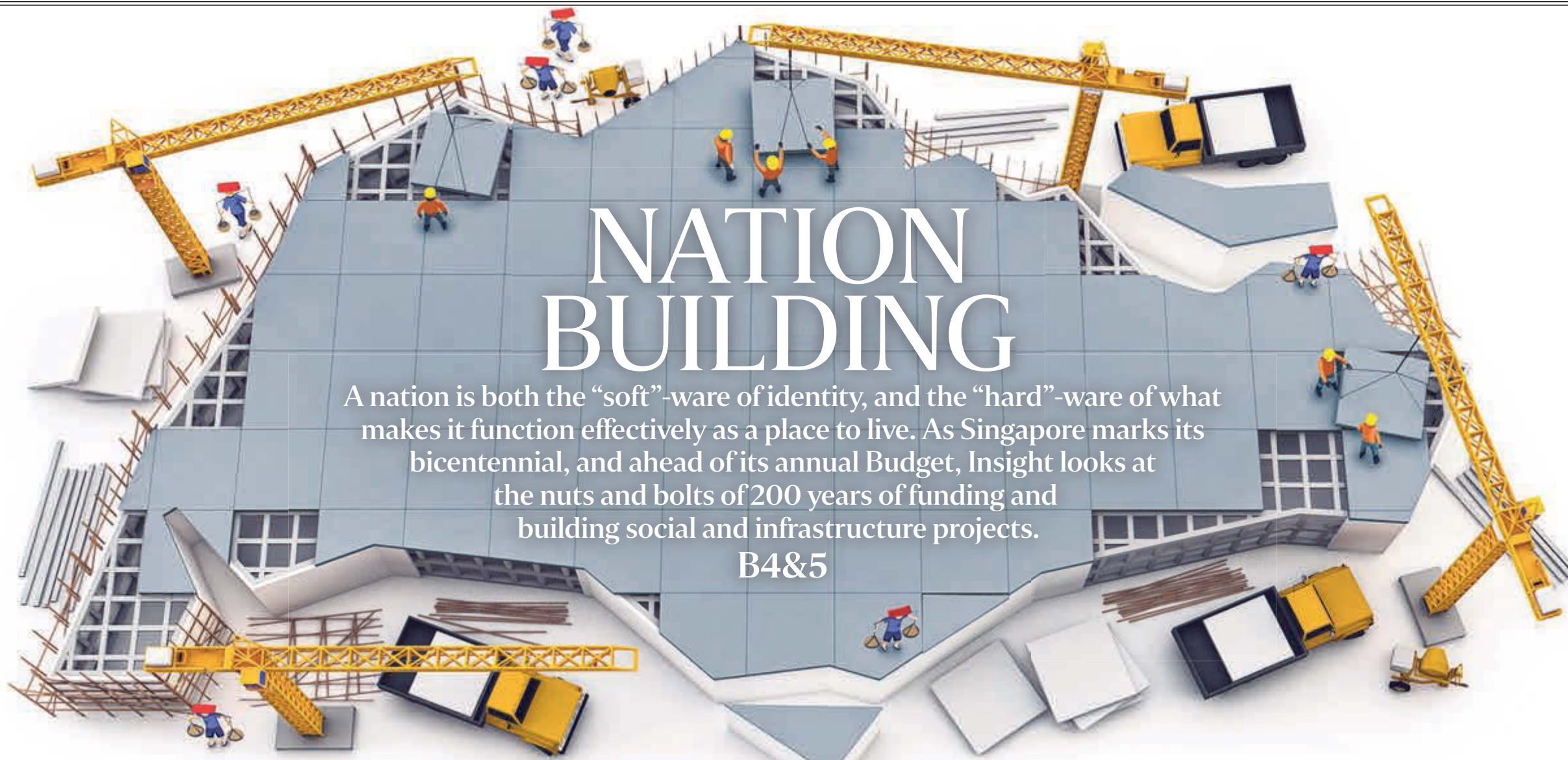
Insight



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B



NATION BUILDING

A nation is both the “soft”-ware of identity, and the “hard”-ware of what makes it function effectively as a place to live. As Singapore marks its bicentennial, and ahead of its annual Budget, Insight looks at the nuts and bolts of 200 years of funding and building social and infrastructure projects.

B4&5

LYDIA LIM

Learning how to marry editorial integrity with commercial savvy

B2



CHONG KOH PING

HK to Beijing, with KFC in between

B3



REI KUROHI

Is it more ethical to eat a strawberry from Malaysia than an air-flown Korean one?

B6



STEVEN KELMAN

Singapore appears to have moved from being a cause to being more of a corporation

B7

ST PHOTOS: JONATHAN CHOO, CHONG KOH PING ILLUSTRATION AND DESIGN: CHNG CHOON HIONG

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The Sunday Times says

Seniors can gain from gig economy

The gig economy is most often associated with younger workers and has come in for a degree of criticism as part-time employees often do not receive the same healthcare benefits and legal protection as full-time staff. But the gig economy could prove beneficial for senior citizens looking for flexible employment options after retirement. Food delivery companies have an estimated 300 delivery riders aged 60 and above under their employ. While this age group makes up only

1 to 2 per cent of the firms' fleets, it is indicative of a trend that could reshape post-retirement employment for seniors. By 2030, the percentage of seniors in the population is expected to rise to 27 per cent while the percentage of youth will fall to 10.8 per cent. This growing segment of seniors have different expectations of life after retirement. Those who hit 60 in 2030 are likely to have a more varied education, outlook and be more digitally savvy than their Pioneer and Merdeka gener-

ation predecessors. This is a generation that benefited from Singapore's transition from Third World to First and would likely have stronger financial bulwarks for retirement. Unlike earlier generations of seniors with limited resources, this coming silver wave will also be more aware of the benefits of active ageing and expect to maintain a certain lifestyle. This is where the gig economy can match-make seniors looking for gainful part-time employment and supplementary in-

come. Given their educational background, it will be no surprise if this group demands more intellectually engaging or spiritually fulfilling jobs. The gig economy, which can span a multitude of industries, is uniquely suited to meet these demands. Savvy firms can take advantage of a well-educated, trained and experienced pool of workers and employers would do well to recognise that they may have no choice but to tap this resource as the pool of younger employees shrinks.

ThinkingAloud

Former editor reveals battles inside New York Times over future of news

News publishers face challenge of growing new sources of revenue



Lydia Lim

I spent many hours last weekend devouring reviews of and excerpts from a new book entitled *Merchants Of Truth* by Jill Abramson.

She was the first woman to be appointed to The New York Times' top editorial post of executive editor, and held the job from 2011 to 2014 – when she was abruptly fired.

The book, billed by its publisher Simon & Schuster as “the definitive report on the disruption of the news media over the last decade”, examines the epic struggles of four publishers – The Times, Washington Post, BuzzFeed and Vice – to reinvent the business of news for the 21st century.

It went on sale in bookshops in the United States on Feb 5 and is now available online as an e-book.

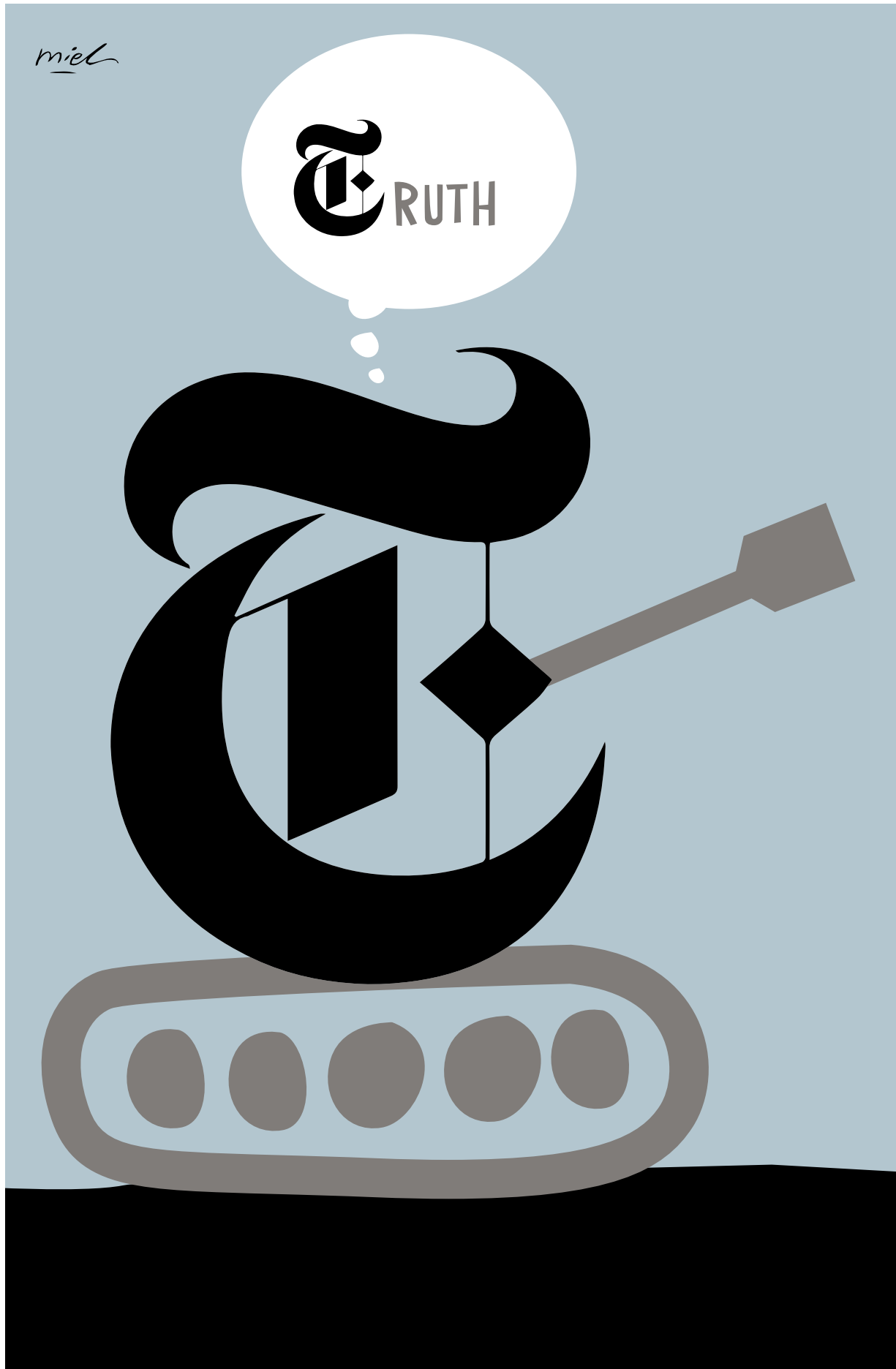
A key question Ms Abramson sets out to answer is whether there is a future for quality news.

In the book's prologue, she writes: “What do I mean by ‘quality news’? News that isn't commoditised, merely chronicling what happened and where, like the stories doled out by public relations firms or announced at staged events. Such stories were published every day.

“Quality news involves original reporting, digging to find the real story behind the story.

Investigative reporting on the murky nexus of money and politics and corporate behaviour. International reporting from hard-to-reach places and dangerous conflict zones. Stories that require the skills of professional journalists using state-of-the-art reporting tools, such as databases and crowdsourcing, and age-old shoe-leather techniques to fill in gaps in the backstory. Stories that are thoughtfully presented, taking advantage of digital technology to provide on-the-scene accounts and visuals that further explain how events transpired. Stories that are edited so as to honour the intelligence of readers rather than exploit their emotions.”

As a career journalist, I am deeply invested in the answer to that question. And if you are reading this column, I trust that you too consider the matter to



be of some weight.

BUSINESS OF NEWS

Ms Abramson's account exposes the unease felt by journalists and editors who learnt their craft in the years when newspapers enjoyed a monopoly over print advertising and large profits, when faced with today's revenue pressures and their implications for newsrooms.

Chief among the changes is that editors now need to take into account business considerations when making decisions, which they rarely did in the past. In fact, it used to be a source of pride among editors that they had the power to shield journalists from commercial pressures, and the clout to stand up to even the largest advertisers.

That partly explains Ms Abramson's outrage when The Times' chief executive Mark

Thompson sought, on her watch, to get the news and business sides of the company to work more closely together. In her book, she recounts in detail one such incident.

“Around a table with a white linen tablecloth sat Andrew Rosenthal, the editorial page editor; Denise Warren, the head of digital operations; Thompson; and me. At one point, Thompson told me that he expected the ideas for new, revenue-producing products to come from the newsroom.

“The last thing The Times needed, I believed, was to have its best journalists distracted from their work by endless meetings with product managers who reported to Thompson. That had become the essence of my job – working on a millennial news app, helping develop the cooking app – and I knew my having to spend

time in unproductive meetings on tasks I mostly hated left the news report without some of the edge it had during my first year as executive editor.

“If that's what you expect,” I snapped at Thompson across the table, “you have the wrong executive editor.” It was the kind of frank admission, uttered in an angry tone, that was never heard at the sedate publisher's lunches we had every Wednesday,” she wrote.

NEWS IN A VUCA WORLD

While I admire her candour, Ms Abramson's accounts of her brusque dismissals of colleagues' views are also cause for reflection, for they remind me of the arrogance that can afflict journalists, not least myself.

That may have mattered less when newspapers enjoyed

monopoly power, but an unwillingness to listen and be open to views different from one's own is a serious drawback in a time of disruption, when the way forward is far from certain.

The challenge of navigating in a VUCA world – an acronym that stands for volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous – is real, and perhaps more difficult for those who have enjoyed some measure of success and are used to having all the answers.

Indeed, in a review of Ms Abramson's book published on the NPR website, literary critic Annalisa Quinn writes: “In *Merchants Of Truth*, Abramson seems to see the world in black and white: new versus old, mercenary versus honourable, clickbait versus reporting, advertising versus editorial, and so on. People are either allies or enemies. But as Abramson – good Jill and bad Jill – should know, it is rarely that simple.”

FUTURE OF NEWS

So is there a future for quality news?

Having weathered a tumultuous decade, The New York Times has emerged as a shining example of a legacy news publisher that has reinvented itself for the digital age.

Last week, it announced that it generated more than US\$709 million (S\$962 million) in digital revenue last year, growing at a pace that suggests it will meet its stated goal of US\$800 million in digital sales by the end of 2020.

More than 3.3 million people pay for the company's digital products, including its news, crossword and food apps, a 27 per cent jump from 2017.

Digital advertising rose 8.6 per cent, to US\$259 million, and surpassed print advertising for the first time in the fourth quarter.

The Times said that its revenue gains would allow it to spend more on its newsroom operations.

Far from failing, as US President Donald Trump claims, The Times is thriving. It continues to hold powerful interests in America to account, and provide outstanding coverage of important global issues, whether they break in Venezuela, China or Yemen. I am happy to declare myself a loyal subscriber and reader.

Its success did not come about from ignoring the business side of news, but from learning how to marry editorial integrity with commercial savvy, so as to serve the needs of both advertisers and readers.

This is also a journey that The Straits Times and other Singapore Press Holdings news titles have embarked on.

We journalists will need to learn the critical skills of navigating ambiguity and exercising judgment in a VUCA world where old monopolies have no choice but to compete for customers' favour by creating new value.

It's an uphill task but those who brave the climb can be sure of learning much along the way.

For journalists and editors, a great prize is at stake.

This is nothing less than a quest – to secure the future of quality news.

lydia@sph.com.sg

A passenger paying for his food using a mobile phone. Attendants on China's high-speed trains prefer passengers to scan a QR code, which can be found at every seat, with their phones to pay or to order food.



Travellers can get an array of snacks, hot drinks and fruit as well as bentos comprising steamed rice, vegetables and meat from the dining carriage.



The Fuxing (Rejuvenation) train from Hong Kong to Beijing is China's fastest train, boasting an average speed of 300kmh and making the journey of nearly 2,500km in just under nine hours. The high-speed rail link was launched last September and is one of the 13 long-haul lines connecting Hong Kong with some 40 major cities on the mainland. ST PHOTOS: CHONG KOH PING

On the fast train from Hong Kong to Beijing

On the new high-speed rail linking Hong Kong and mainland China, many things unfold at top speed, from food orders to the changing of the seasons.



Chong Koh Ping

The last time I rode more than 2,000km across China, it was on the fastest "slow" train from Beijing to Kunming.

It was the summer of 2012 and the train, which chugged along at an average speed of 68kmh, was packed.

Many people had got on with only a standing ticket and were standing or sitting along the aisle on foldable stools. By nightfall, some were sleeping in the toilets, under the seats and even in the big sinks.

It was only 44 hours or seven meals later that I reached Kunming, in south-western Yunnan province.

Fast forward six years and I found myself on China's fastest train, which boasts an average speed of

300kmh. I was on the Fuxing (Rejuvenation) train from Hong Kong to Beijing, a new high-speed rail link launched last September.

The journey of nearly 2,500km took just under nine hours.

In these six years, China's high-speed rail network has more than quadrupled to 29,000km, the world's longest in terms of track length.

The train to Beijing is one of the 13 long-haul lines connecting Hong Kong with some 40 major cities on the mainland.

I had taken the trip for a multimedia interactive feature, to unearth stories from each of the eight stops on the route, which covers almost two-thirds of China.

What I saw over just a day felt like the accelerated changing of the seasons – the lush greenery of the south turned into the golden brown of post-harvest fields in the central plains and finally to the depressing grey of the smoggy north.

Rail travel is a mode of transport for all seasons and classes in China.

At one end are the trains with hard seats, at the other are high-



A passenger putting on warmer clothing as the train travels northwards. There are eight stops on the route, which covers almost two-thirds of China.

Interactive: A journey up north



speed rail trains offering greater comfort and faster journeys. The HSR trains are speedy, on time and more friendly on the pocket than taking domestic flights if you are travelling at short notice.

My second-class seat from Hong Kong to Beijing cost 1,077 yuan (S\$217) – going the same way by air can cost anything from below 1,000 yuan to more than 2,000 yuan.

As I live in China, I booked a ticket on my Chinese railway app and paid a handling fee to have my ticket printed out at the West Kowloon station in Hong Kong. It took me about 30 minutes to clear Customs on both the Hong Kong and China sides at the station.

My train was not quite half filled when we left Hong Kong. There were only five people in my carriage of 90 second-class seats.

But by the time we left the next station – Shenzhen North – the entire carriage was filled and suitcases spilled onto the aisle.

A train attendant dressed like a flight stewardess pushed a trolley with snacks, hot drinks, fruit and bentos comprising steamed rice, vegetables and meat. Travellers can also get these from a sales counter in the dining carriage.

China's high-speed trains may not be any faster than those in other countries, but they have an edge in the speed and ease of payments on board. You don't have to fish out change for snacks. Like most sales assistants in China, train attendants prefer if you scan a QR code with your mobile phone to pay, saving everyone the hassle. And at every seat, there's a QR code you can scan to order food from the next stop.

In Changsha, I used the train app on my mobile phone to order fried chicken, whipped potato, corn and an egg tart from KFC in Wuhan, the next stop.

About an hour later, after my train pulled out of Wuhan, a train at-

tendant delivered my order to my seat.

I met a man in his 60s who had taken his grandson to Hong Kong for his vaccination shot, as he was concerned about defective vaccines in the mainland, especially after a scandal rocked the country last year.

As the train pulls right into the heart of Zhengzhou, it is a much more convenient way for him and his party of five to travel than to take a flight.

A few months later, he will repeat this journey when the boy is due for his next vaccination.

At the end of another carriage, Ms Qiu Jiaxian, 24, an exchange student at Hong Kong University, was standing in a corner practising an English speech for a contest in Beijing. "I need more time to stand up and make some gestures to get ready for my speech," she told me in English, to explain why she is taking the train and not the plane.

IT consultant Virinder Singh Bhasin, 31, an Indian national who lives in Hong Kong, told me in Mandarin that he would choose the HSR over the plane.

It is more punctual, he said, compared with domestic Chinese flights which are often delayed.

Certainly, the ride north went smoothly and arrived on time in Beijing, right before 5pm.

It was a comfortable ride: There was enough legroom and a tray table to put mobile devices, a book or laptop – a good set-up to watch TV, play games, read or work.

It was so comfortable my neighbour was in deep slumber for most of the nine hours. She said: "I don't feel worn out by the nine-hour journey, I feel that I've just woken up."

For me, I was just happy that I didn't have to count the passage of time by the number of meals I had eaten. I reached Beijing before it was time to have another meal on the train.

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Nation-building

A betel nut tax, anyone?

Betel nuts were among the tax items that provided colonial-era Singapore with revenue. As Singapore commemorates its bicentenary, political correspondent **Linette Lai** looks back over the past 200 years at how Singapore has raised revenues and spent on essential needs for a nation in four areas: infrastructure, security, education, and health and housing.



Workers paving a taxiway for a project which includes construction of Changi Airport Terminal 5. Among the other projects on the horizon for Singapore are the Tuas Megaport and the Cross Island Line. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

Infrastructure

Boosting essential services, transport and airport facilities

Despite British attempts to improve infrastructure through public works projects, Singapore in the 1830s was a dismal place.

Much of the island was covered in jungle and swamp. In the town, streets were prone to flooding, littered with rubbish and lit only by coconut oil lamps.

The reason for this was simple: The colonial administration of Singapore – which was then part of the Straits Settlements – had no money. More than once, it proposed taxing trade but met with violent objections from merchants and was forced to back down.

Instead, taxes were imposed on items like pork, toddy and betel nuts, with the main sources of revenue coming from taxes on opium and arrack, a type of alcohol. As late as 1906, opium taxes still provided half of the colony's revenue.

Convict labour proved to be a cheap solution to that problem in the later half of the 19th century. Many convicts were shipped over from India – the Straits Settlements were known as “the Sydney convict settlements of British India” – and put to work on public works projects. These included roads, a hospital, St Andrew's Cathedral and Government House, which later became the Istana.

As the town thrived, hills were levelled, swamps drained and nutmeg plantations cleared to make way for new buildings. Gas lighting

supplanted the old coconut oil lamps, and was in its turn replaced by electric street lights. Municipal expenditure rose from less than \$63,000 (as it was described then) in 1857 to more than \$500,000 in 1886.

When the Great Depression hit the industrialised world in the 1920s and 1930s, Singapore was not spared. Public expenditure hit a record high in 1931 as the Government tried to lower unemployment by embarking on public works projects.

But the following year, these projects were put on hold. Taxes were raised, and government officials were laid off.

After the war, public infrastructure was, unsurprisingly, in a sorry state, and restoring essential services was the top priority. In 1963, the Public Utilities Board was set up to manage water, electricity and gas.

A decade later, the vast majority of Singaporeans had access to piped water. By 1980, the whole of Singapore had been linked to the main sewerage system, and night-soil collection became a relic of the past.

Government spending on infrastructure flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. After years of debate and delay, the Government had finally decided to build the MRT system and had also begun work on Changi Airport.

Both projects together cost billions of dollars. They also meant that Singapore had to take loans from various sources, including the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

In his speech, Dr Tan outlined how more than half of the \$14.7-billion Budget would go towards achieving three objectives, one of which was improving physical infrastructure.

That year, the transport and communications budget went up 67.7 per cent, with \$842 million set aside for the MRT system and the expansion of Changi Airport, which had officially opened two years before.

During its first two weeks in operation, the airport carried out guided tours to the restricted area after immigration, for a fee of 50 cents per person. Work on Terminal 2 began in 1986, and in 1987, the MRT began operations for the first time with a 6km stretch between Toa Payoh and Yio Chu Kang.

During a post-Budget dialogue last year, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said that Singapore's upcoming infrastructure spending needs are at levels not seen in 30 years.

Projects on the horizon include the Tuas Megaport, Changi Airport Terminal 5, the Cross Island Line, and the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High Speed Rail – the last of which has been postponed until May 2020.

“As our economy grew and the tax collection was strong, we stopped borrowing some time in the mid-1980s for our major infrastructure projects,” Mr Heng noted.

“Now, we are coming back to another major spike in our infrastructure needs.”



The first HDB blocks in Singapore, along Stirling Road in Queenstown. In 1960, the Housing Board was formed and it built as many housing units and shops in three years than the SIT did in its 32-year existence. ST PHOTO: HDB

Social spending

Improving housing, healthcare for growing population

In the early years of Singapore's recorded history, social spending in areas like housing and healthcare was severely limited by the Government's lack of funds.

Government offices in the 1830s were located in merchants' stores, and even the British-so-designated “First Resident” lived in a wooden bungalow so flimsy that “people looked up after a stormy night to see if it was still there”.

Living conditions were poor and Singapore's first hospital – funded largely through a \$7,000 gift from businessman Tan Tock Seng – only scratched the surface of the problem. Built in 1849, it faced a swamp used as the town's main rubbish dump. Many patients did not survive. In fact, the Straits Settlement Records show that the hospital committee said in 1857: “No one will enter who can crawl and beg, unless compelled by the police.”

Little progress in healthcare was made over the next few decades, and the lack of a proper water supply and sewerage system meant that diseases could spread easily.

In 1857, Peranakan merchant Tan Kim Seng donated \$13,000 to help set up a water supply system, but the works were completed only in 1879.

Conditions improved in the 20th century. Several hospitals were built, including the new Outram General Hospital complex, Woodbridge Mental Hospital, and Kan-

gang Kerbau Maternity Hospital. Today, these are the Singapore General Hospital, Institute of Mental Health, and KK Women's and Children's Hospital.

On the housing front, the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) was formed to tackle housing issues. Set up in 1927, its tasks included widening existing roads, tearing down “unsanitary buildings” which contributed to the spread of death and disease, and building homes for low-income families.

But Singapore's population was expanding rapidly and the SIT could not keep up. In 1931, the population stood at 560,000. By 1947, after the end of the Japanese Occupation, it had risen to 941,000. There were so many people that the SIT's building programme could accommodate only one-third of the annual increase.

Thousands of people were squatters, and hospitals were left without equipment or medication.

In 1945, the death rate was twice the pre-war level. When the newly established Social Welfare Department carried out a survey, it found that overcrowding was a serious problem, with many families living in just one room and others squatters in shanty towns.

In 1960, the Housing Board was formed and replaced the SIT. In the following three years, it managed to complete 26,000 flats under the direction of its chairman

Lim Kim San. The HDB constructed as many housing units and shops in three years than the SIT did in its entire 32-year existence.

Healthcare spending continued to grow as well. In 1966, government expenditure on health services was \$71.12 million, amounting to about 11 per cent of the total spent. For the financial year 1974/1975, this had gone up to about \$122 million. And between 1971 and 1975, health expenditure per capita went up by 70 per cent from \$28 to \$68 at 1971 prices.

Even at that time, concerns were already surfacing about the elderly, who at that time made up 6.6 per cent of the population. Now, they make up around 14 per cent of the population. This proportion is expected to grow to 25 per cent by 2030, and has been the impetus for significant government outlay on healthcare for seniors – notably the \$8 billion Pioneer Generation Package in 2014 and the upcoming Merdeka Generation Package.

Government spending on housing has also been growing – not just with the building of new flats, but with schemes like the Home Improvement Programme (HIP) to upgrade older flats.

The HIP scheme was launched in 2007, and \$1.93 billion was spent on it between then and March 2017. The entire programme is expected to cost the Government more than \$4 billion.

Last year, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that all flats will get a second round of upgrading when they are about 60 or 70 years old. Called HIP II, the scheme will be launched in about 10 years.

National Development Minister Lawrence Wong said that HIP II will be a “significant financial commitment” for the Government, adding that it would need to see “how to pace the works to take into account fiscal sustainability and the capacity of our construction industry”.



Queenstown Technical School students in a technical class in earlier years. In modern Singapore, education has been seen as a means of upgrading its key resource, with education spending often second only to defence. ST FILE PHOTO

Education

Getting people to keep learning and push their potential

For most of the 19th century, British officials saw no need to have a formal education policy for the local population.

Many locals were, in any case, migrant workers who were here to make their fortunes and had no intention of settling in Singapore for the long term.

Although several schools were set up – mostly in the vernacular languages and typically funded by wealthy benefactors – interest was lukewarm and enrolment rates low.

In one school set up by missionary Benjamin Keasberry, a total of 52 boys were officially enrolled in 1863 but half were usually absent.

In another – the Singapore Institution, which later became Raffles Institution – classes were offered in a variety of local tongues. But fewer than 10 years after it was established, only one Hokkien class of 25 pupils remained.

In 1870, a Select Committee on Education found that education in Singapore “has been and is in a backward state”. The Straits Times was less kind. In a commentary the following year, it wrote: “Upon the whole, education in the Straits (has) failed.”

Despite this, some of the earliest schools survived and have become household names today.

Apart from Raffles Institution, they include St Joseph's Institution, St Margaret's School and the

Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus. The authorities began to put more emphasis on education in the 20th century, starting with a formal Education Code in 1902 and the establishment of many English-language primary schools.

In the following years, institutes for tertiary and technical education were set up. Between 1924 and 1932, government spending on education nearly doubled.

At the primary school level, the Government fully subsidised four years of Malay language education and significantly offset school fees for pupils in English-medium schools. Some Chinese and Tamil schools got grants as well.

During the Japanese Occupation, education was seen as a useful tool to create a new loyalty among the local population, especially children. As a 1942 article in the

In 1968, the Singapore Year Book characterised education as “one of Singapore's outstanding achievements”, listing among other things how teachers made up nearly 1 per cent of the total population.

Syonan Shimbun put it: “The most powerful of all the means available to propaganda is education.”

To this end, the Japanese took over the direct running of most schools, formulating a standard education policy which included changing the curriculum to a Japanese-style one.

POST-WAR: UPGRADING

Elected to government in 1959, the People's Action Party dedicated nearly one-third of the budget to education during its first nine years in power. Between 1959 and 1969, school enrolment shot up from 305,000 to 511,000, and expenditure on education from \$63 million to \$175 million. In 1968, the Singapore Year Book characterised education as “one of Singapore's outstanding achievements”, listing among other things how teachers made up nearly 1 per cent of the total population.

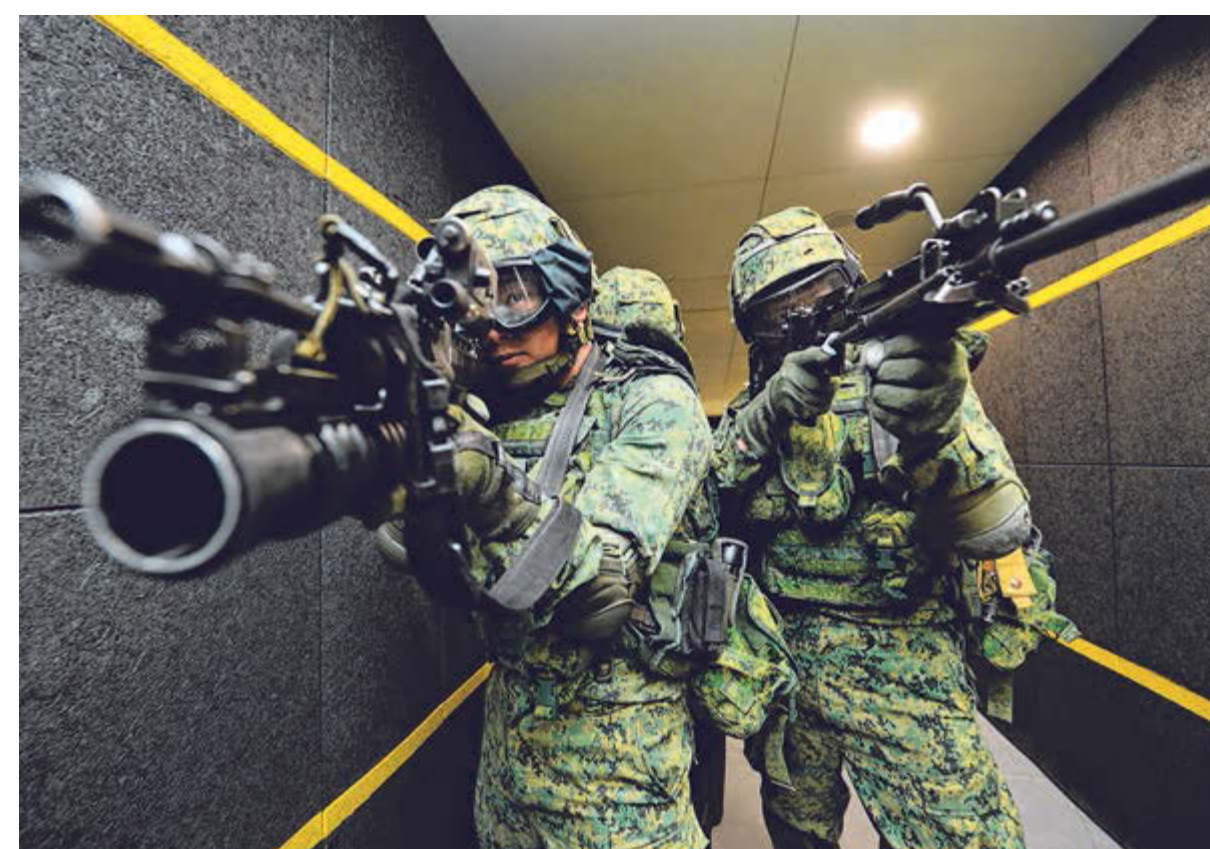
In modern Singapore, education has traditionally been seen as a means of upgrading its key resource, with education spending often second only to defence.

The latest big boost to education came in the form of the SkillsFuture initiative, which was set up to encourage workers to keep learning after they have left school.

In 2015 – when Singapore celebrated its golden jubilee marking 50 years of Independence – the Government estimated that the average of \$1 billion would be spent each year on SkillsFuture continuing education and training initiatives between then and 2020.

Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, who was then also Finance Minister, underscored the importance of this push during his Budget speech.

“We must become a meritocracy of skills, not a hierarchy of grades earned early in life – a society where people keep learning and pushing their potential, and are valued for their contributions at each stage of life,” said Mr Tharman.



SAF soldiers undergoing training at Pasir Laba Camp in 2013. Despite wide-ranging security threats, Singapore expects its defence spending to keep pace with inflation at about 3 to 4 per cent each year. ST FILE PHOTO

Security

Investing in defence to protect nation

When the British arrived in Singapore in 1819, they found their new trading outpost a hotbed of violent crime. The first police force – a tiny outfit with less than 15 staff, including a single constable – was set up by William Farquhar a year after his arrival as what the British call “First Resident”. The cost of setting up the force was 300 Spanish dollars.

But although the ranks of the poorly paid force managed to swell in the 1840s and 1850s, it could not keep up with the flood of immigrants from India and China, many of whom were convicts or secret society members, and who formed criminal gangs that roved about the settlement.

In 1854, the Singapore Free Press wrote: “It is not overdrawn the picture when we say that we have in this small island the very dregs of the population of Southeastern Asia.” In the same article, it lamented that police officers were being paid the same amount as domestic servants despite being exposed to “no small share of personal risk and danger”. It added that vacancies in the force were often filled by “raw hands picked up wherever they can be found, and who know nothing of their duties”.

Assigned to tackle this problem, the first Superintendent of Police, Thomas Dumanan, fought to raise pay and reduce working hours for his men, with significant progress made by the time he retired in 1871.

In the 1930s, a significant proportion of government funds were earmarked for training the police force, which had grown to about 2,000 officers. After World War II, the police formed the Volunteer Special Constabulary. They received firearms training and helped to maintain law and order.

In the 1980s, the Singapore Police Force began tapping community policing – fighting crime by involving the community. This remains a key pillar of its strategy today.

THREATS FROM OUTSIDE

External defence was not a priority for Singapore's colonial masters in the early years though the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854 led the British to build fortifications – notably Fort Canning – in response.

In 1886, Sir Frederick Weld, who was Governor of the Straits Settlements, noted that the British fleet was sorely lacking in comparison to two Japanese warships that had stopped over in Singapore waters. “One of our naval men who went over them said either was worth all our fleet in this sea – which is made up of the greatest rubbish – put together, if it came to a fight,” he wrote to a friend.

Even in 1939 – three years before Singapore fell to the Japanese – few locals were actively involved in the country's defence. According to historian C.M. Turnbull, this was because the British ruling class

assumed that locals “would panic at any hint of trouble, and that they would not be willing to suffer and die for an alien regime”.

After Independence, the British said in a 1967 White Paper that they planned to withdraw their forces from Singapore by the mid-1970s. Six months later, the deadline was brought forward to 1971 and the abrupt change sparked the ramping up of defence spending, to meet security needs. That year, Defence Minister Lim Kim San announced the establishment of a Singapore Defence Fund to build up defence forces. The first donation – made on Jan 29 – was a \$10,000 cheque from six Citizens Consultative Committees.

Businesses and trade associations rallied in support, with the National Trades Union Congress even suggesting that workers ask for a day's work at double pay to be given to the fund. By the end of February, over \$1.6 million had been raised.

In 1969, the Government spent \$208.7 million on internal security and defence – one of the major items of expenditure that year.

In the years to come, Singapore continued to invest in defence, with defence spending making up about a third of government expenditure in the mid-2000s. During a 2007 dialogue session, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said: “I think every dollar is well spent. You've only got one small island, one small army. Every soldier counts.”

In the past decade, defence spending has dipped to about 19 per cent of government expenditure. Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen said last year that despite wide-ranging threats, Singapore expects its defence spending to keep pace with inflation at about 3 to 4 per cent each year. “Even for the next decade, Mindel does not foresee any spike in defence spending. Obviously, this will not apply if there are exigencies or unexpected scenarios.”

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A composite aerial shot of Singapore in 1960 and the transformation by 2015. In 1963, the Public Utilities Board was set up to manage water, electricity and gas. A decade later, the vast majority of Singaporeans had access to piped water. By 1980, the whole of Singapore had been linked to the main sewerage system, and night-soil collection became a relic of the past. ST FILE PHOTOS

What's Trending

What would a social media-ready selfie look like?

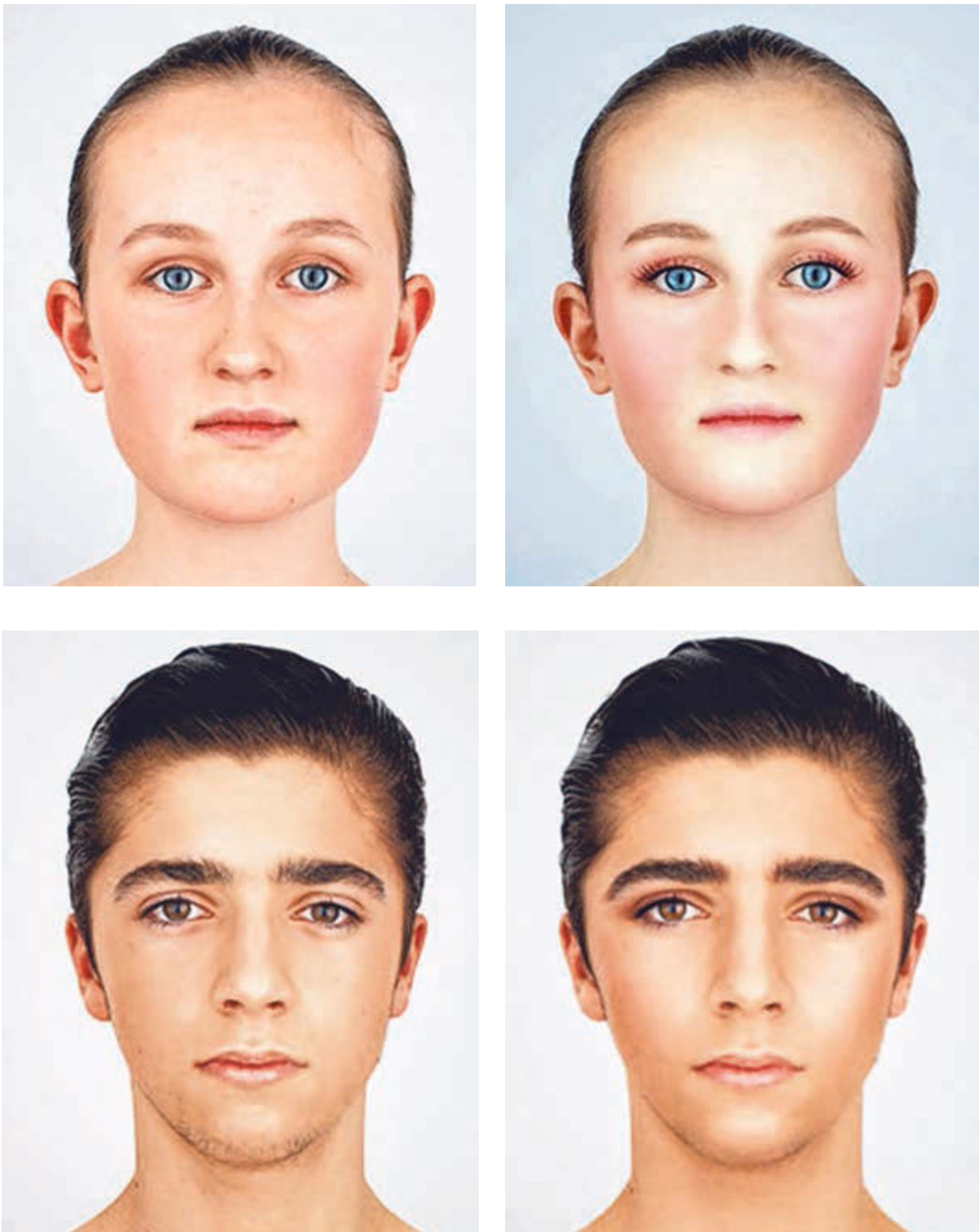
British photographer asks 13 teenagers and a 10-year-old to edit their own photos to find out



Nilanjana Sengupta

The freckles vanish, the eyes become brighter, the nose is sharper and the jawline chiselled. One face after another morphs into a flawless, edited, version of itself. The faces belong to 13 teenagers and one 10-year-old who were photographed by British fashion photographer John Rankin Waddell, known by his working name Rankin. He gave the original photographs he took to his subjects and asked them to make them social-media ready, using the B612 beauty and filter camera application. He then put the original photos next to their edited, touched-up versions and created a video, which he uploaded onto his Facebook page. “For my latest series, Selfie Harm, I photographed teenagers and handed them the image to then edit and filter until they felt their image was ‘social media-ready,’” he writes in the caption for the video, which has been viewed almost 40,000 times and shared more than 200 times. As the four-minute, 20-second video plays, the difference between the photos is drastic and almost shocking, until one realises that the edited photos are not real. It is also revealing because we all do it – look for our best angle and smile – for our profile photo. But when the line between real and edited alters us beyond recognition, it is time to sit up and take notice. Rankin’s note that the majority of

his subjects preferred their original photos comes as a relief. One of them, 14-year-old Maisie, e-mailed The Sunday Times: “I preferred the untouched photo because the edited photo was unrecognisable – alien-like. I felt guilty editing myself into something I wasn’t.” When asked whether she usually uses beauty applications to touch up her photos for social media, she said: “Despite the culture of social media, I don’t feel self-confident enough to post photos of myself and so don’t use beauty apps. I feel that I don’t meet social expectations of beauty, and the expectations that I put upon myself. However, I do use filters to make the other pictures I take look nicer, never to alter my appearance.” In a follow-up Facebook post on Feb 1, the day after Selfie Harm was uploaded, Rankin, a critic of Photoshop, underlined the danger of beauty and filter apps that “any 10-year-old can download in seconds and essentially ‘play’ with”. He said: “Something like Photoshop, which is a much more complex and inaccessible programme, is actually part of a huge social ethical discussion, bringing the issues and harmful aspects of it to light and exploring its effect.” On the beauty apps, he said: “These filters are something very new and, in my opinion, a lot more dangerous. It’s almost like giving a teenager access to a Photoshop expert.” The series, part of a project by Rankin, M&C Saatchi and MT Art Agency called Visual Diet, examines how images can affect mental health. “It’s time to acknowledge the damaging effects that social media has on people’s self-image,” Rankin said. A debate on the issue is indeed timely, although social media may not entirely or completely be at fault here. As Facebook user Liz Stowe says: “Unfortunately this stems from way before social media. I think unrealistic standards in the fashion and beauty industries fostered this long before people were handed the ability to follow suit on their phones. It starts with the industry that promotes unreal beauty ideals and unattainable norms.” Another dangerous side to beauty apps was highlighted last week with the news that Google has banned 29 malicious apps, all advertised as beauty cameras on its Play store.



The original (left) and edited images of Maisie, 14, and Felix, 15, who were part of photographer Rankin’s Selfie Harm project. “It’s time to acknowledge the damaging effects that social media has on people’s self-image,” said Rankin. PHOTOS: RANKIN

NOTABLE TRENDS

- EMILIANO SALA:** The Argentine footballer and Cardiff City striker’s body was identified on Friday after it was recovered almost three weeks after the plane he was in went down in the English Channel.
- EX-PRINCESS UBOL RATANA RAJAKANYA:** The 67-year-old Thai royal’s unprecedented decision to stand as a candidate in upcoming polls stunned the country and prompted opposition from her brother, Thailand’s King Maha Vajiralongkorn.
- #THANKUNEXT:** Ariana Grande dropped her fifth album on Friday, less than a year after her last album, Sweetener, debuted on the top of the Billboard 200 chart.

ONLY ONLINE

The week’s top 3 picks at straitstimes.com

VIDEO: Seniors in food delivery
Mr Ang Thing Yue is one of about 300 delivery riders aged 60 and above who send food to hungry customers.
str.sg/seniorsdeliver

VIDEO: Hangout with ST
Topics include the spat between a Gojek driver and his passenger, and Chinese New Year celebrations.
str.sg/hangout50

VIDEO: Budget – Stages of life
See how various Budget measures announced over the years have had an impact on different Singaporeans.
str.sg/budgetlife

waterfalls Aling-Aling and met (a) very sweet girl from Australia. It’s (a) long story, but I don’t know her name and phone number. Know that she is from Australia and arrived in Bali for a not long holiday,” he wrote. Mr Frolov said he thought about how to find her and posted his appeal in various Australian Facebook groups in Bali. “If you see (this post), let me know. I fell in love,” he said. A day later, he posted an update on his Facebook page: “I got more than 100 reposts, more than 1,000 comments and a lot of likes!” A week later though, there is no news on whether Mr Frolov met with any success. Facebook users have begun cheering him on and hoping that he gets an answer one way or the other. Sharing his post on her page, user Liz Hayes wrote: “Any drivers take an Australian girl to Aling-Aling Waterfall yesterday? Arseniy Frolov is looking for her.” However, some are giving him a reality check. “Ever thought the girl may not want his attention?” said one Stewart Dyson. Will this story have a fairy-tale ending in Valentine’s Day week? Only time will tell.

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#OpinionOfTheDay

A dieting effort which led to food for thought



Rei Kurohi

On Sunday, three weeks ago, my brother watched as I picked bits of mutton out of my supper of *maggi goreng* with chopsticks and placed them gingerly onto a saucer.

“Do you really have to weigh everything?” he asked, amused, as I balanced the saucer atop a tiny plastic weighing scale from Daiso. “Yes, all the meat,” I insisted. I’m no bodybuilder trying to optimise my proteins. It was my third day on a new diet designed to save the planet and I had to know how much red meat I was about to eat. The low-meat “planetary health diet”, as it’s called, is meant to be healthy and ecologically sustainable. A day’s quota consists of 14g of red meat, including pork, and less than 30g each of poultry and fish. Most of the 2,500-calorie diet is made up of whole grains, fruits and vegetables. It can’t be too hard, I thought at the start. Vegetarian food has been gaining ground here in the last few years, with new products and eateries focused on plant-based foods being introduced. Movements like Meatless Mondays, which advocates cutting out meat once a week, have also

found their way here. Hospitals, university dining halls and even high-end restaurants have begun offering more meatless options due to the growing interest. And last year, Earth Society vice-president Low Chip Khoo told The Straits Times that more young people in Singapore are willing to reduce their meat consumption due to greater climate change awareness and education. But vegetarianism is still far from mainstream in Singapore. According to figures from the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority, the average Singapore resident eats 30kg of chicken and 20kg of pork a year. As a heavy meat-eater myself, my intake likely exceeds these numbers. I thought it might be interesting to try to eat more sustainably. So I started carrying a weighing scale around and documenting what I ate. I did it for three weeks, spanning Chinese New Year and its temptations as an added challenge. Once I announced my self-directed experiment on social media, I started getting encouragement and recommendations from vegetarian or vegan friends – there were more of them than I’d realised. I also started to notice vegetarian options for pizza, Mexican food and Indian food, and even vegetarian chain restaurants like

Greendot that I had never paid attention to. In the first week, the novelty was still fresh and it was fun to gamify my meals. I ended the week quite pleased with myself for being well below my aggregated quotas. Doing this consistently, however, was harder than I thought. That weekend, I gave myself a “cheat day” to eat what I normally would, just to see how it would measure up. A plate of chicken rice and a mentaiko pork cutlet set meal later, I had blown nearly all of my quotas for the second week in one day. And as the novelty of weighing everything wore off and slowly became an annoyance, a question I kept getting asked was: “Will you stick with it after the three weeks?” Well, the weighing scale had to go, but I started to ask myself what it would take to commit to reducing my meat intake in the long run. Ethical consumption can be difficult or nigh impossible, given the complexity of our modern societies. A friend snidely observed that I was eating less meat to reduce my carbon footprint, but continued to order food delivery, thereby adding to it. That made me think about the climate impact hidden in long supply chains; Singapore imports over 90 per cent of the food we consume. This concept of “food miles” originated in the 1990s. Some researchers say the overall impact

of food transportation is negligible compared to the energy used to produce the food or to cook it. But all other things being equal, is it more ethical to eat a strawberry trucked in from Malaysia than an air-flown Korean one? What a rabbit hole to go down. I asked myself: If I care about this, shouldn’t I give up air travel? If I give up plastic straws, shouldn’t I give up online shopping and its excessive packaging? If I am appalled by shark’s fin soup, shouldn’t I also be outraged at the human suffering caused by the production of fast fashion, smartphones and diamond rings? Though adopting this diet started out as an exercise in climate change mitigation, it quickly became refocused on ethics. But most of all, it made me think of animal suffering, though we are unlikely to witness it. While the diet creators’ recommendations were based on environmental and health concerns, many of my friends said they avoid meat to be humane to animals. These views were not new to me. In my first year of university, I encountered moral philosopher Peter Singer’s arguments against eating meat on the basis of the suffering it causes to sentient animals. I recall agreeing with Mr Singer, arguing in support of his conclusions in class, and then promptly shelving his premises

when the semester ended, continuing to eat meat at almost every meal despite not being able to justify it morally. A Buddhist friend pointed out that factory chickens live comparatively lower-quality lives compared with pigs or cows. So poultry and eggs may be easier on the environment, but beef and pork could cause less direct suffering per kg of meat. It can be tempting to give in to cynicism, but those trying to live more ethically shouldn’t be discouraged. As my Buddhist friend put it: “It’s helpful for me to remember that it’s okay to be morally imperfect. What really matters is that I’m trying, most days, to be better.” What do we owe to what we eat? Perhaps trying, at the least, to be a bit more aware and compassionate. By the time Chinese New Year actually came around, I found it much easier to resist the allure of *bak kwa*. Too high in salt, fat and suffering. I’ve laid aside my weighing scale for now, but I too will try to be better, one meatless meal at a time.

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- See what Rei Kurohi was eating on Instagram @tsukemonogatari
- #OpinionOfTheDay is a column for younger writers in the newsroom to write about issues that matter to them and their peers.



Traffic in North Bridge Road in 1968, when trishaws shared the road with cars and buses. Singapore's middle way helped show the world an alternative to communism and fascism in past decades, says the writer. The Republic can continue to show the world a middle way between the excesses of capitalism and unsustainable unfettered welfare, he adds. PHOTO: THE PORTERS

Singapore 50 years ago, and now: An Asian middle way?

A Harvard professor with a long acquaintance with Singapore reflects on its socialist roots and says it should continue to show the world a middle way.

Steven Kelman
For The Sunday Times

In 1971, one year out of Harvard University, I spent two weeks in Singapore as part of my first trip to Asia. I had been lucky to win one of two “travelling fellowships” Harvard awarded to graduating seniors – allowing travel wherever one wanted, with the only requirement being to write a report when done. Almost every winner used the fellowship to travel to Asia, because even then it was common for young Americans to travel to Europe, but much more so to Asia.

In Asia, Singapore was one of my longer stops along a route also taking me to Japan and India (one month each), Hong Kong (two weeks), Korea, Thailand, and Indonesia (one week each), and Nepal (three days).

The most interesting thing about my decision to visit Singapore at all, and to stay a full two weeks, was that it came about because of my admiration for the People's Action Party (PAP) government, which mixed strong opposition to communism with commitment to socialism.

Since junior high school, I had been very interested in politics. I had always been on the left, but at age 16, my path diverged from other political students in my high school because of disillusionment with Cuban leader Fidel Castro's embrace of dictatorship. I rejected the brutality and inhumanity of communism.

Instead, staying on the left, I became a convinced social democrat, in the tradition of the German Social Democrats, British Labour, and especially the Swedish Social Democrats.

Sweden was my first love then. An American writer in the 1930s had dubbed Sweden a “middle way” between communism and fascism. They had chosen a welfare state to promote equality and social justice while gaining the productivity and innovation benefits of keeping industry in private hands. I actually started studying Swedish in my junior year and had spent time there on a scholarship after graduating.

What brought me to this tiny speck of land 15,000km from America in 1971 was that Singapore became my second love.

This was a time when, in the context of opposition to the Vietnam War, Asian communism was on the ascendance. Many Western young people admired revolutionary lead-

ers such as Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh and China's Mao Zedong. I learnt that Mr Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore had beaten back the communists, but remained an advocate of socialism.

In 1968, the first time I went to Sweden, Mr Lee spoke at the congress of the Socialist International, the organisation of social democratic parties. In 1970, the PAP reaffirmed its commitment to socialism, stating Singapore had made significant strides towards achievement of “our socialist goals, a more just and equal society”. The PAP's frugal style and hatred of corruption, symbolised by the white garments activists wore, also appealed to me.

Stopping communism, promoting social justice, and being honest were noble causes for which the PAP was struggling. To me, Singapore was an Asian middle way, offering the world a path between communism and unfettered capitalism.

I wanted to visit to learn more. I had read about two social achievements, government-subsidised housing and its role in encouraging industrial development at Jurong.

While there, I gave myself a young social democrat's tour of Singapore.

I took buses to visit a Housing Board estate and journeyed to the Jurong Industrial Estate. It turned out that the Swedish machinery company ASEA (now ABB) had a small facility there, which I came across during my visit.

To reflect my passions for Sweden and Singapore, I snapped a picture. I also took pictures of People's Park, which had then opened only a year earlier – my social democratic soul relished the moniker.

And, to add to my knowledge, I bought a book on Mr Lee by Alex Josey, a Briton who worked on psychological warfare against Malayan insurgents and later became Mr Lee's press secretary for a decade, that gave me details on his fight against communists. I also bought a book, complete with colour photos, on the HDB.

I actually, presumptuously, requested an interview with Mr Lee himself. I had written a book critical of US student radicals that was published in my senior year at Harvard and syndicated in The Chicago Tribune. The Tribune had accepted my idea of writing occasional columns they would syndicate while I was travelling.

Officials got back to me to say the

Prime Minister was not available, but that I could interview the Finance Minister, Dr Goh Keng Swee. The only thing I remember from the interview is that he discussed Singapore's eagerness to attract foreign investment to help growth, and thus to pave the way for later development of more generous welfare policies.

Seeking foreign investment was then quite controversial among many developing-country governments, on the grounds that this would promote dependence in newly freed nations. Dr Goh's approach of promoting growth as a first stage towards redistribution appealed to me as a middle way between giving no role to private business and letting companies run roughshod.

My stay of course was not just politics. For most of my trip, I stayed at youth hostels but in Singapore, I decided to treat myself and, using royalties from writing, stayed at the Raffles Hotel.

One of my most vivid memories was Queen Elizabeth Walk, just across from the Raffles and fronting parallel to the sea, before the land reclamation of later decades. It was a fairly quiet green oasis filled with strollers. There I tasted satay for the first time, bought from one of the many hawkers (I didn't know that word then).

It was love at first bite, and I ended up eating half my dinners there – usually chicken, with lots of peanut sauce. Sometimes it was noodles with vegetables, whose somewhat smoky, pungent smell I still remember, and occasionally nasi goreng. The Padang was near the Raffles, and I went by pretty often; in those days, the Padang was much more important in the city than now. I frequently saw people playing informal ball games.

SINGAPORE TODAY

I have been visiting Singapore on and off since then, for a total of more than five visits. In 2012, I was in Singapore for six weeks to serve as the Li Ka Shing Visiting Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP), and have periodically delivered individual lectures there. During my most recent trip last November, I spent almost a week in Singapore and met academic friends such as LKYSPP dean Danny Quah, and the legendary Tommy Koh, former Singapore ambassador to the US.

My impressions of Singapore 50 years on?

Clearly, there's a lot to like about what the PAP has done during these decades, transforming Singapore from the Third World to First – though I think calling Singapore in the 1960s “Third World” is a somewhat poetic exaggeration. Of the countries I visited in 1971, most – South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Nepal – were poorer than Singapore.

Singapore's growth and the alleviation of poverty have been outstanding. Singapore student test scores are world-leading, leaving the US in the dust. Singapore to me physically is not only a vibrant but often also a beautiful city.

However, the social democrat in me was taken aback to read in Mr Lee's memoirs that he and his government had long decided that socialism did not work: “Watching the ever-increasing costs of the welfare state in Britain and Sweden, we decided to avoid this debilitating system. We noted by the 1970s that when governments undertook primary responsibility for the basic duties of the head of a family, the drive in people weakened.

“Welfare undermined self-reliance. People did not have to work

The social democrat in me fears that a low tax regime, particularly on capital, may have become orthodoxy for its own sake rather than an unfortunate adaptation to a perceived harsh reality. If it is viewed more as the latter, there would be more serious discussion about raising taxes at the top end to fund a more generous redistribution system that can reduce inequality.

for their families' well-being. The handout became a way of life. The downward spiral was relentless as motivation and productivity went down. People lost the desire to achieve because they paid too much in taxes. They became dependent on the state for their basic needs.”

I had always associated Singapore with the protections and redistribution of a welfare state, and the explanation I had heard back in the early 1970s for the lack of government-provided social security had been that Singapore hadn't introduced these “yet” because the country was still too poor.

I hadn't known that there had been some statements in a similar vein that Mr Lee had made as early as the beginning of the 1970s. As a party, the PAP has clearly undergone a shift in ideology from being socialist democrat.

I consider myself an admirer of Singapore – feeling a sense of kinship with its socialist democrat roots – who remains a fan enamoured of the modern city-state it has become.

One thing though that worries me about today's Singapore is that the nation appears to have moved from being a cause to being more of a corporation.

The ideals the PAP fought for in the 1950s and 1960s, I am not ashamed to state – despite the local encomiums to pragmatism – were noble ones. Singapore helped turn communism back in Asia, in a very tough battle. Along the way, it has helped build a nation and delivered a good standard of living to two, three generations of Singaporeans.

I hear from Singaporean friends that the recent few years have seen a resurgence of concern about redistribution and that PAP leaders have spoken openly about shifting “left” closer to its social democrat roots.

There has been a fair amount of commentary and debate about the future of Singapore's economic and political system, including in The Straits Times.

The social democrat in me fears that a low tax regime, particularly on capital, may have become orthodoxy for its own sake rather than an unfortunate adaptation to a perceived harsh reality. If it is viewed more as the latter, there would be more serious discussion about raising taxes at the top end to fund a more generous redistribution system that can reduce inequality.

If Singapore were to revisit its socialist roots, it would have to face the fact that taxes have become lower and less egalitarian. The top tax rate on individual income was 55 per cent in 1980, but starting in 1982 it was successively lowered eventually to reach 20 per cent in the early 2000s. The corporate tax rate was 40 per cent until 1987, when it was lowered to 33 per cent, then in 2000 to 26 per cent and 17 per cent in 2010. (In the United States, after a massive corporate tax rate cut of over 50 per cent under President Donald Trump, our corporate tax rate is 21 per cent, and many US states also tax corporate profits separately.) The estate tax on wealth was abolished in 2008.

Singapore, unlike the US, has never had a tax on capital gains (such as capital gains on property or stock profits). In 1994, a goods and services tax was introduced, a consumption levy taking more of a bite from low- than high-earners.

If one's goal is to have lower taxes than other countries, this is good policy. But the earlier PAP would have explicitly included redistributive goals that seem now subordinate. I see recent debates on inequality as part of an effort to return the PAP to the social justice side of its roots.

In the 2015 Budget, the top personal income tax rate was raised from 20 per cent to 22 per cent; when announced, The Straits Times reported that the “Government announced a move to tax the rich more”. The Government's role in healthcare provision is also expanding.

Call me nostalgic, but I'd like to add myself to those who would like some rebalancing of Singapore social and economic policies, and a renewed attention to the dual nature of the PAP's original message, to the idea of Singapore as an Asian middle way.

Singapore's middle way helped show the world an alternative to communism and fascism in past decades. In the current global debate on the balance between workers and the elite, and on the ills of populism, Singapore can continue to show the world a middle way between the excesses of capitalism and unsustainable unfettered welfare.

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The man at the centre of the Bezos blackmail storm

Gavin de Becker has studied thousands of threatening letters. Now the ‘protector of celebs’ has stepped into the spotlight of Bezos’ claims against a tabloid

Tim Elfrink

For decades, inside an unremarkable warehouse outside Los Angeles, one man gathered among the most remarkable collections in America: hundreds of thousands of letters, all of them worrisome. Some promised terrible violence. Others merely hinted at calamity. Some even included off-putting gifts like syringes of bodily fluid, animal corpses, and hair.

They were all carefully saved and catalogued by Mr Gavin de Becker, arguably the world’s foremost expert on threatening messages.

Mr de Becker has charted a unique course by simultaneously offering quiet protection to celebrities from the scariest elements of their fame, while also becoming world-famous in his own right as a best-selling author and go-to source for predicting assassinations and other bloody attacks.

Now he is in the heart of a political maelstrom centred on – of course – a set of threatening messages.

Mr Jeff Bezos, Amazon’s founder, published e-mails on Thursday that appear to show the National Enquirer threatening to publish intimate photos unless he ends Mr de Becker’s probe into how the tabloid acquired private texts showing his relationship with former TV anchor Lauren Sanchez. (Mr Bezos owns The Washington Post.) The source of the e-mails, were reports about Mr de Becker’s view that the Enquirer’s

story was politically motivated and linked to associates of United States President Donald Trump.

The case brings new scrutiny on Mr de Becker, who has spent decades investigating those trying to intimidate his clients in Hollywood and the business world – and tussling in the past with the National Enquirer when those interests collided. Described by Mr Bezos as “one of the smartest and most capable leaders I know”, Mr de Becker emerged from a violent childhood to essentially create a new industry of threat prediction.

In his best-selling 1997 book, *The Gift Of Fear*, Mr de Becker describes being physically abused for years by his mentally ill, drug-addicted mother. One traumatic moment in particular set the course of his life, he writes: watching his 33-year-old mother repeatedly shoot his stepfather.

“His hands were held out stiffly in front of him as if they could stop bullets. I remember wondering for a moment if it would hurt to be shot,” he wrote. But his mind was whirring with the more pressing question of trying to predict whether she would actually pull the trigger. Small clues told him she would: Her finger’s pressure on the hammer, the way she backed away from her cowering partner, her foresight in buying the gun. She ended up firing repeatedly.

The man survived, but Mr de Becker writes that his trauma only continued. His mother beat him viciously “with everything in the house”, he told the Los Angeles Times in 2002. When Mr de Becker was 16, she killed herself at the age of 39.

Mr de Becker’s grandfather rented a Beverly Hills apartment so he could attend the local school district, where he made friends with future stars like Carrie Fisher and Miguel Ferrer, who later based his *Twin Peaks* character, FBI agent Albert Rosenfield, on Mr de Becker. His move into celebrity protection, in fact, came when Ferrer’s mother, singer Rosemary Clooney, invited him to move in after his mum’s death and he became her “de facto road manager”, The Times reported.

That led to a gig as an assistant to Dean Martin’s ex-wife Jeanne Martin, and jobs for Elizabeth Taylor and Shaun Cassidy. Mr de Becker had been fascinated with keeping public figures safe since watching in horror as president John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. It “was the first world event that had any impact on me personally”, he told the Los Angeles Times in 1989.

Now he realised the Hollywood stars he worked for had glorified bouncers watching their backs. “Gavin turned that whole business around and invented it, really. He ran a protective detail the way the Secret Service would operate,” Cassidy told The Times.

He founded his business, Gavin de Becker and Associates, in 1978, and began his life’s work: compiling detailed records of the stalkers and other dangerous figures haunting his clients. Within a few years, his research was acclaimed enough that president-elect Ronald Reagan hired him to pro-



Described by Mr Jeff Bezos as “one of the smartest and most capable leaders I know”, Mr Gavin de Becker (left) emerged from a violent childhood to essentially create a new industry of threat prediction.

PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Mr de Becker's rise coincided with John Lennon's 1980 assassination and the emergence of mentally ill fans who stalked celebrities. By the end of the decade, he counted the likes of Robert Redford, Jane Fonda and Joan Rivers as clients. He worked carefully to sort the threats those celebs faced into categories, from harmless super fans to legitimately deranged characters.

tect guests at his first inauguration, The Times reported, and then invited him onto a Justice Department advisory board.

Mr de Becker’s rise coincided with John Lennon’s 1980 assassination and the emergence of mentally ill fans who stalked celebrities. By the end of the decade, he counted the likes of Robert Redford, Jane Fonda and Joan Rivers as clients.

He worked carefully to sort the threats those celebrities faced into categories, from harmless super fans to legitimately deranged characters. And the method he worked out soon blossomed into a unique tool: the Mosaic threat assessment systems. He saw the programme as a direct extension of the skills he had learnt watching his mother – a systematic way to anticipate bloodshed. “The way I broke down the individual elements of violence as a child became the way the most sophisticated artificial intuition systems predict violence today,” he wrote in *The Gift Of Fear*.

“My ghosts had become my teachers.”

In its early days, his programmes were largely used by police to protect high-risk residents like politicians or judges, the Los Angeles Times said in 1997. Mr de Becker later expanded Mosaic to profile domestic abusers and to try to curb violence in schools. Now, Mosaic is available as a free online questionnaire that can be used by anyone interested in obtaining “comprehensive assessments” of threats.

As Mr de Becker worked to protect celebrities, he sometimes came into direct conflict with the tabloid papers that aggressively cover them – including the National Enquirer. In 1990, the tabloid was besieged in court with

lawsuits from Taylor and Roseanne Barr, and a wave of stories alleging the paper paid people to be phoney sources.

The paper’s editor at the time, Mr Iain Calder, had a scapegoat for all the drama: Mr de Becker.

“There are a powerful group of celebrities that have put together a war chest and gone to Gavin de Becker to go after us,” he told the Associated Press (AP) in 1990.

Mr de Becker scoffed at that. “No, there isn’t a specific group of clients bent on destroying the Enquirer,” he told the AP. “The idea of 100 major media figures gathering in a gymnasium... shouting ‘Give me the head of the National Enquirer’ is absolutely ridiculous.”

Mr de Becker, though, has earned a reputation of being willing to go to incredible lengths for his clients, whose privacy he vigorously protects. When George Harrison was gravely ill in 2001, he arranged for him to retire to a secret location – the address so closely guarded that even close friends had to go to a fictitious address first and then be escorted there, the Los Angeles Times reported. The consultant took public heat when that non-existent address made it onto Harrison’s death certificate that same year.

The consultant’s own celebrity rose precipitously in 1997, when *The Gift Of Fear* rocketed up best-seller lists after Oprah Winfrey endorsed the book and invited him on the show. The book delves into the lessons Mr de Becker had learnt from studying violence, while bemoaning an America that appears addicted to bloodshed.

“It is an unusual firm,” he writes of his operation, “one that could only exist in America and, in most regards, need only exist in America.”

Few of his famed investigations have approached the ongoing Bezos case in terms of sheer public interest, though. As Mr Bezos wrote Thursday on Medium, he hired the consultant after the tabloid published its report on his relationship with Ms Sanchez to figure out how the Enquirer had obtained his private texts.

“I’ve known Mr de Becker for 20 years,” Mr Bezos wrote. “I asked him to prioritise protecting my time since I have other things I prefer to work on and to proceed with whatever budget he needed to pursue the facts in this matter.”

That investigation, as The Post reported on Tuesday, led Mr de Becker to point the finger at Mr Michael Sanchez, Lauren’s brother.

Mr Michael Sanchez is a “pro-Trump Hollywood talent manager”, The Post reported, who is acquaintances with Mr Roger Stone,

Mr Trump’s longtime ally who was recently indicted by special counsel Robert Mueller, and former Trump adviser Carter Page. Mr de Becker told the Daily Beast that “strong leads point to political motives” behind the Enquirer story.

In the e-mails published by Mr Bezos, officials for American Media Inc, the parent company of the National Enquirer, demanded that both he and Mr de Becker renounce those claims. Instead, Mr Bezos made the demands public.

As the turmoil rages over Mr Bezos’ claims, the foreword to the Kindle edition of Mr de Becker’s 1997 bestseller may offer another window into his view of the proceedings. “Most human predators... seek power,” he writes. “To destroy or damage something is to take its power. This applies equally to a political movement, a government, a campaign, a career, a marriage, a performance, a fortune, or a religion.

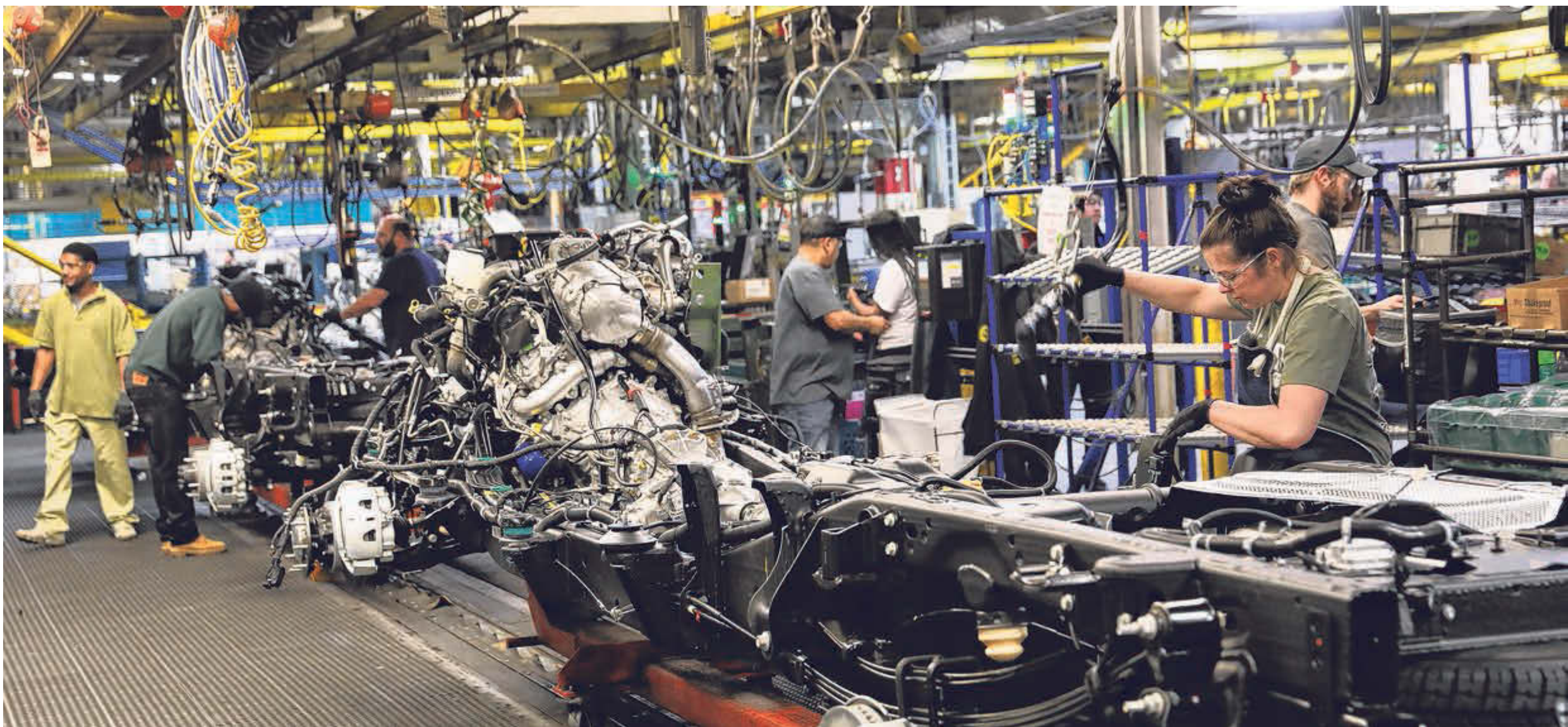
“To push a pie into the face of the world’s richest man is to take his power,” he adds, “if only for a moment”. WASHINGTON POST



Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and his wife MacKenzie (right), who is divorcing him. Mr Bezos published e-mails on Thursday that appear to show the National Enquirer threatening to publish intimate photos unless he ends Mr Gavin de Becker’s probe into how the tabloid acquired private texts showing his relationship with ex-TV anchor Lauren Sanchez (left). PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Technology is splitting the US workforce into two



Highly educated workers are reaping rewards while the lower skilled are stuck in dead-end jobs

Eduardo Porter

PHOENIX (Arizona) • It's hard to miss the dogged technological ambition pervading this sprawling desert metropolis in the US.

There's Intel's US\$7 billion (S\$9.5 billion), 7-nanometer chip plant going up in Chandler. In Scottsdale, Axon, the maker of the Taser, is hungrily snatching talent from Silicon Valley as it embraces automation to keep up with growing demand. Start-ups in fields as varied as autonomous drones and blockchain are flocking to the area, drawn in large part by light regulation and tax incentives. Arizona State University is furiously churning out engineers.

And yet for all its success in drawing and nurturing firms on the technological frontier, Phoenix cannot escape the uncomfortable pattern taking shape across the US economy: Despite all its shiny new high-tech businesses, the vast majority of new jobs are in workaday service industries, such as healthcare, hospitality, retail and building services, where pay is mediocre.

The forecast of an America where robots do all the work while humans live off some yet-to-be-invented welfare programme may be a Silicon Valley pipe dream. But automation is changing the nature of work, flushing workers without a college degree out of productive industries, like manufacturing and high-tech services, and into tasks with meagre wages and no prospect for advancement.

Automation is splitting the US labour force into two worlds. There is a small island of highly educated professionals making good wages at corporations like Intel or Boeing, which reap hundreds of thousands of dollars in profit per employee. That island sits in the middle of a sea of less educated workers who are stuck at businesses like hotels, restaurants and nursing homes that generate much smaller profits per employee and stay viable primarily by keeping wages low.

Even economists are reassessing their belief that technological progress lifts all boats, and are beginning to worry about the new configuration of work.

Recent research has concluded that robots are reducing the demand for workers and weighing down wages, which have been rising more slowly than the productivity of workers. Some economists have concluded that the use of robots explains the decline in the share of national income going into workers' pay cheques over the last three decades.

Because it pushes workers to the

less productive parts of the economy, automation also helps explain one of the economy's thorniest paradoxes: Despite the spread of information technology, robots and artificial intelligence (AI) breakthroughs, overall productivity growth remains sluggish.

"The view that we should not worry about any of these things and follow technology to wherever it will go is insane," said economist Daron Acemoglu at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Semiconductor companies like Intel or NXP are among the most successful in the Phoenix area. From 2010 to 2017, the productivity of workers in such firms – a measure of the dollar value of their production – grew by about 2.1 per cent per year, according to an analysis by Dr Mark Muro and Mr Jacob Whiton of the Brookings Institution. Pay is great: US\$2,790 a week, on average, according to government statistics.

But the industry does not generate that many jobs. In 2017, the semiconductor and related devices industry employed 16,600 people in the Phoenix area, about 10,000 fewer than three decades ago.

"We automate the pieces that can be automated," said vice-president Paul Hart, who runs the radio-frequency power business at NXP's plant in Chandler. "The workforce grows, but we need AI and automation to increase the throughput."

Axon, which makes the Taser as well as body cameras used by police forces, is also automating whatever it can. Today, robots make four times as many Taser cartridges as 80 workers once did less than 10 years ago, said Mr Bill Denzer, Axon's vice-president for manufacturing. Workers' jobs were saved because the company brought other manufacturing work back from Mexico.

The same is true across the high-tech landscape. Aircraft manufacturing employed 4,234 people in 2017, compared with 4,028 in 2010. Computer systems design services employed 11,000 people in 2017, up from 7,000 in 2010.

To find the bulk of jobs in Phoenix, you have to look on the other side of the economy: where productivity is low. Building services providers, like janitors and gardeners, employed nearly 35,000 people in the area in 2017, and healthcare and social services accounted for 254,000 workers. Restaurants and other eateries employed 136,000 workers, 24,000 more than at the trough of the recession in 2010. They made less than US\$450 a week.

The biggest single employer in town is Banner Health, which has about 50,000 workers throughout a vast network that includes hospitals, outpatient clinics and home health aides. Though it employs high-paid doctors, it relies on an army of lower paid orderlies and technicians. A nursing assistant in Phoenix makes US\$31,000 a year,

CAUSE FOR CONCERN

The view that we should not worry about any of these things and follow technology to wherever it will go is insane.



PROFESSOR DARON ACEMOGLU, an economist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

POWERED BY A.I.

We automate the pieces that can be automated. The workforce grows, but we need AI and automation to increase the throughput.



MR PAUL HART, NXP vice-president who runs the company's radio-frequency power business at its plant in Chandler.

CREEPING DOUBTS

Until a few years ago, I didn't think this was a very complicated subject: The Luddites were wrong, and the believers in technology and technological progress were right. I'm not so completely certain now.



DR LAWRENCE SUMMERS, a former US Treasury secretary and presidential economic adviser.

on average. A home health aide makes US\$24,000.

While Banner invests heavily in technology, the machines do not generally reduce demand for workers. "There are not huge opportunities to increase productivity, but technology has a significant impact on quality," said Banner's chief operating officer Becky Kuhn.

The 58 most productive industries in Phoenix – where productivity ranges from US\$210,000 to US\$30 million per worker, according to Muro's and Whiton's analysis – employed only 162,000 people in 2017, 14,000 more than in 2010.

Employment in the 58 industries with the lowest productivity, where it tops out at US\$65,000 per worker, grew 10 times as much over the period, to 673,000.

The same is true across the US economy. Jobs grow in healthcare, social assistance, accommodation, food services, building administration and waste services. Not only are some of the tasks tough to automate, employers have little financial incentive to replace low-wage workers with machines.

On the other end of the spectrum, the employment footprint of highly productive industries, like finance, manufacturing, information services and wholesale trade, has shrunk during the last 30 years.

Economists have a hard time getting their heads around this. Steeped in the belief that technology inevitably leads to better jobs and higher pay, they long resisted the notion that the Luddites of the 19th century, who famously thrashed the weaving machines that were taking their jobs, might have had a point. "In the standard economic canon, the proposition that you can increase productivity and harm labour is bunkum," Professor Acemoglu said.

By reducing prices and improving quality, technology was expected to raise demand, which would require more jobs. Also, economists thought, more productive workers would have higher incomes. This would create demand for new, unheard-of things that somebody would have to make.

To prove their case, economists pointed confidently to one of the greatest technological leaps of the last few hundred years, when the rural economy gave way to the industrial era.

In 1900, agriculture employed 12 million Americans. By 2014, tractors, combines and other equipment had flushed 10 million people out of the sector. But as farm labour declined, the industrial economy added jobs even faster.

What happened? As the new farm machines boosted food production and made produce cheaper, demand for agricultural products grew. And farmers used their higher incomes to purchase newfangled industrial goods.

The new industries were highly

productive and also subject to furious technological advancement. Weavers lost their jobs to automated looms; secretaries lost their jobs to Microsoft Windows. But each new spin of the technological wheel, from plastic toys to television sets to computers, yielded higher incomes for workers and more sophisticated products and services for them to buy.

Something different is going on in today's technological revolution. In a new study, Professor David Autor of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Dr Anna Salomons of Utrecht University found that over the last 40 years, the number of jobs has fallen in every single industry that introduced technologies to enhance productivity.

The only reason employment didn't fall across the entire economy is that other industries, with less productivity growth, picked up the slack. "The challenge is not the quantity of jobs," they wrote. "The challenge is the quality of jobs available to low- and medium-skill workers."

Lord Adair Turner, a senior fellow at the Institute for New Economic Thinking in London, argues that the economy today resembles what would have happened if farmers had spent their extra income from the use of tractors and combines on domestic servants.

Productivity in domestic work does not grow quickly. As more and more workers were bumped out of agriculture into servitude, productivity growth across the economy would have stagnated.

"Until a few years ago, I didn't think this was a very complicated subject: The Luddites were wrong, and the believers in technology and technological progress were right," Dr Lawrence Summers, a former US Treasury secretary and presidential economic adviser, said in a lecture at the National Bureau of Economic Research five years ago. "I'm not so completely certain now."

The growing awareness of robots' effect on the working class raises anew a very old question: Could automation go too far? Boston University's Prof Acemoglu and Dr Pascual Restrepo argue that businesses are not even reaping large rewards for the money they are spending to replace their workers with machines.

But the cost of automation to workers and society could be substantial. "It may well be that," Dr Summers said, "some categories of labour will not be able to earn a subsistence income."

And this could exacerbate social ills, from workers dropping out of jobs and getting hooked on painkillers, to mass incarceration and families falling apart.

Silicon Valley's dream of an economy without workers may be implausible. But an economy where most people toil exclusively in the lowliest of jobs might be little better. NYTIMES

A General Motors plant in the US. Automation is changing the nature of work, flushing workers without a college degree out of productive industries, like manufacturing and high-tech services, and into tasks with meagre wages and no prospect for advancement. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

MUTANT MOZZIES v MALARIA?

Combating malaria by modifying mosquitoes could save thousands of lives – but it’s also risky

Henry T. Greely

Last year, about 440,000 people worldwide, mostly children below five years of age, died of malaria – nearly one every minute. Another 210 million people survived but suffered from one or two weeks of high fever, shaking chills and other symptoms. The toll in human suffering is immense but relatively hidden from most parts of the world because the majority of cases occur in sub-Saharan Africa.

Biotech holds out the potential of progress – possibly soon. People don’t give people malaria: The 460 species of mosquitoes in the genus *Anopheles* do, and researchers are taking aim at them.

One approach uses genetic engineering to reduce, or even eliminate, populations of malaria-carrying mosquitoes – for example, by modifying males to ensure that all their offspring are infertile.

Another more elegant tactic uses genetic modifications to make mosquitoes immune to the malaria plasmodium, the parasite that causes the disease. Either kind of change can be amplified by doing the genetic engineering along with a trick called “gene drive”, which speeds the spread of such changes through a population.

The stakes of deploying or not deploying such research are high: From the moment we develop such technologies, “every day we wait kills between 1,200 and 2,000 people”, notes Vox correspondent Dylan Matthews.

Can we in good conscience hold off from using these technologies as soon as possible?

Yes, we can. In spite of the stakes – in some ways because of the stakes – it is important that we get this right before we try it. We have a moral imperative to fight malaria, but we also need a better understanding of the environmental, medical and political risks before we rush in. And we need to regulate the relevant experiments and field tests, not just to avoid unanticipated ecological side effects but also to forestall political resistance.

We’re at an extraordinarily sensitive moment in this debate. In November, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity met in Egypt; in the run-up to the meeting, a movement for a full ban on gene drives gained momentum.

In the end, a bloc of African governments, concerned about their citizens’ health, derailed it, but opposition may grow again if a gene-drive experiment goes wrong or is perceived to have gone wrong (the 196 parties to the convention do not include the United States, which signed on to it in 1993 but, due to conservative opposition, has never ratified it).

At a very basic level, it is not clear whether or how well these new methods will work. Only one approach, pursued by a company called Oxitec, has had field tests (in Brazil, Panama and the Cayman Islands). Oxitec modified males of a non-malaria-carrying but still dangerous mosquito species, *Aedes aegypti* (a carrier of dengue, Zika and yellow fever, among other diseases), so that their offspring would be infertile.

The firm claims that the species’ populations in the test areas dropped by 80 per cent, but more work is needed. One strong and enduring lesson of the past four decades of biotechnology is how often great ideas fail even after good initial results. Oxitec recently announced an agreement with the Gates Foundation to create an *Anopheles* mosquito using its genetic modification.

But once we know genetic modification of mosquitoes will work

against malaria, should the techniques be rolled out quickly? Lives would be saved almost instantly, and, unlike drugs given to humans, the side effects of modified mosquitoes won’t include inadvertently making people sicker. But other risks demand attention – especially ecological hazards.

In the 1950s and 1960s, an extremely effective pesticide called DDT wiped out malaria in some parts of the world, including the United States. But DDT wreaked havoc on some non-mosquito species, including eagles and pelicans, and is thought to have harmed human reproductive health and to have probably caused cancer (high levels were clearly bad, but the effects of chronic low-level exposure are far more uncertain). As a result, its use was greatly curtailed, a decision that remains controversial because it allowed malaria to persist in some places.

Anopheles mosquitoes pollinate some plants and provide food for some animals – how would plunging numbers of some of those species affect ecosystems? Even a drop in the number of malaria-carrying mosquitoes might have consequences; perhaps those mosquitoes help control the population size of some other animals (for example, rats) by infecting them with the human pathogen or a related pathogen also affected by the genetic engineering. *Anopheles* mosquitoes are not a classic keystone species – a species, like the wolves in Yellowstone, whose removal changes an ecosystem quickly and radically – but we simply don’t know what the ecological effects of reducing their population would be.

A second risk is that the genetic modifications may drift from one mosquito species to others. Beyond the 460 species of *Anopheles* mosquito, at least another 2,500 or so mosquito species do not carry malaria but might be affected. How many of them mate and have offspring with *Anopheles* species or otherwise trade genes in the wild? And, if they did, what would be the consequences?

We might end up eliminating species of mosquitoes, including those that never bite humans, with unknown consequences, compounding the ecological risk.

A risk of a different sort is that early benefits will shrink. The mosquitoes may develop resistance by mutating around the population-reducing changes.

The gene drives that push the changes through populations may lose their power through mutations over generations.

All these risks can be studied. Small-scale deployments can offer hints about the effects of large interventions. We can consider ways to monitor, control and even reverse the introduced genetic changes, possibly by means of “kill switches” that allow the destruction of modified mosquitoes.

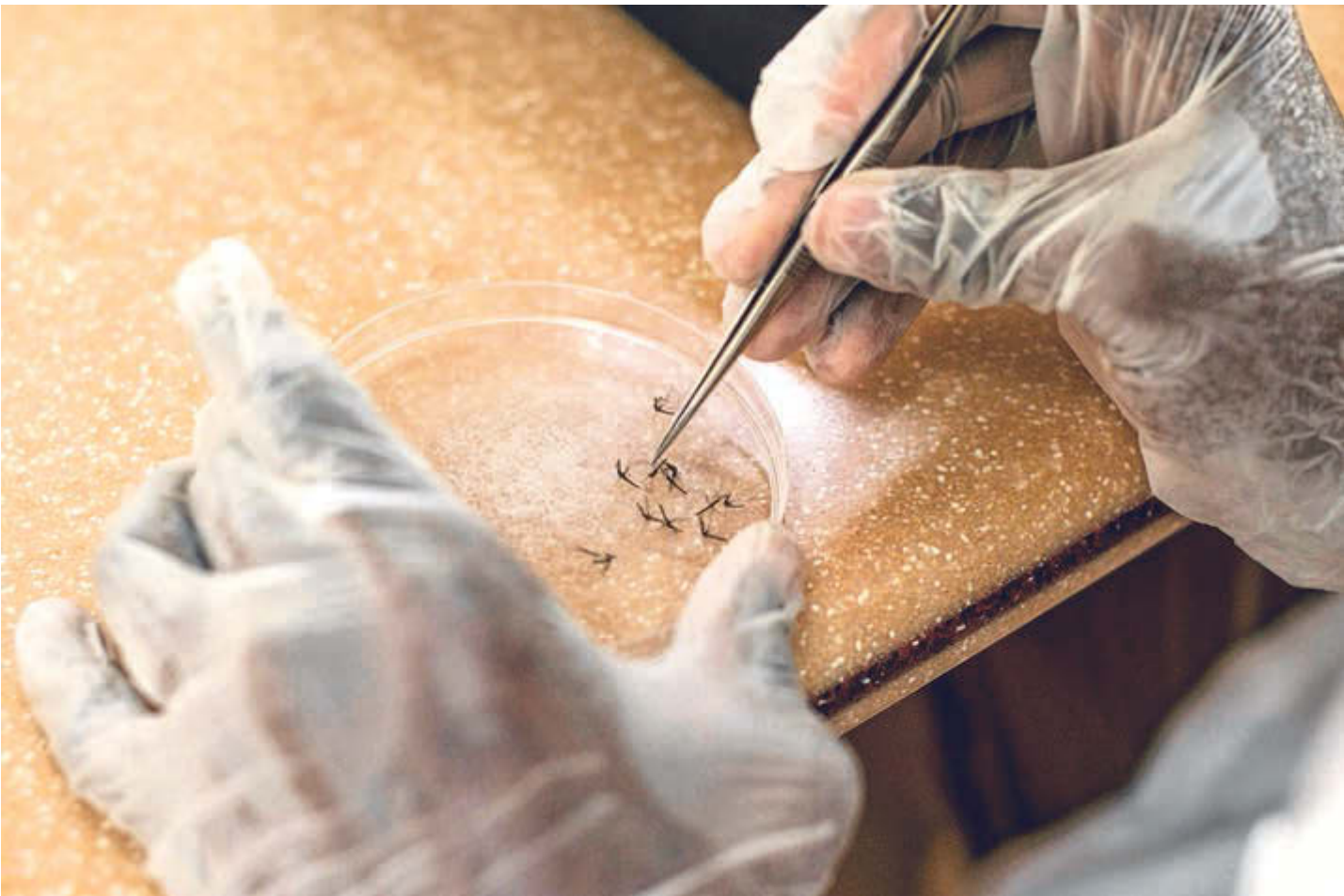
One technique under study involves giving the engineered mosquitoes either a critical dependence on, or an acute vulnerability to, some otherwise benign substance. Withholding the substance, in the first case, or providing it, in the second, would kill the mosquitoes while harming nothing else. We might also use gene drives to reverse the original changes.

A very different set of complicated risks arises from human reactions to these experiments. Advocates of these technologies are terrified about a backlash like the one that has hit genetically modified foods. In 2002-2003, in the midst of a famine, several African countries at least initially refused to allow the distribution of genetically modified foods.

In November, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Bi-



A worker spraying insecticide to kill mosquitoes in Bangkok. In the 1950s and 1960s, DDT wiped out malaria in some parts of the world but it wreaked havoc on some non-mosquito species and is thought to have caused cancer and harmed human reproductive health. PHOTO: REUTERS



ological Diversity ultimately approved a cautious approach to moving forward with deployment of this technology. Researchers would have to show that engineered insects posed no threat, and any distribution of modified mosquitoes would have to be preceded by the “free, prior and informed consent” of people who live in affected areas.

One good start to building confidence would be to open up research by making broadly available results and data from research into genetic modification of mosquitoes. Individual firms might lose some control and some advantages, but the field could gain enormously from decreased mistrust.

Firms, researchers and government funders (including, for example, the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency, which is interested in the extraordinary new DNA editing technique called Crispr, with or without gene drives) should be required to describe publicly what they want to do, how and why (with Crispr, researchers can cheaply and easily edit specific “letters” of the DNA of the initial target mosquito. And supplemented with gene drives, Crispr can be used to change all copies of that DNA stretch in each of that mosquito’s

descendants – including “normal” versions of the gene it inherited from its other parent).

Securing meaningful consent could be a tricky business. Oxitec’s releases of genetically modified *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes in Brazil, Panama and the Caymans were made with government permission, the company says. But when it wanted to do a test release in the Florida Keys, it was stymied.

The Florida Keys Mosquito Control District held a non-binding referendum on the project in November 2016; the proposal was approved in the overall district but rejected by voters in the region where the release was planned, Key Haven. Oxitec is now trying to get approval for a different Florida test site.

Mosquitoes, of course, do not respect local or national borders, further complicating the issue of consent. Changed mosquitoes in countries that approve their release may lead to similar populations in places that rejected them. And not just immediate neighbours, either: Mosquitoes spread through international trade and human travel – the Asian tiger mosquito, *Aedes albopictus*, successfully invaded the United States by catching rides in imported used tyres. Yet requiring

worldwide consensus before proceeding in any one place is a recipe for stalemate.

There is a lot to be done to determine whether and how to use genetically engineered mosquitoes to fight malaria. It may sound like an agenda for decades of work. But again, 440,000 people are dying every year. We don’t have decades for cautious debate.

History knows the name of Henry Gunther, the last soldier killed in World War I, one minute before the Armistice. How many died of Aids who would have survived if the anti-retrovirals had been approved just a month, or a week, or a day earlier?

And who will be the African toddlers whose deaths by malaria could have been prevented if only we had moved faster with the genetic modification of mosquitoes?

It’s never possible to know the perfect time to introduce a new intervention, but we need to investigate these new approaches and their likely consequences both carefully – and urgently. WASHINGTON POST

• Henry T. Greely is director of the centre for law and the biosciences at Stanford University. He is the author of *The End Of Sex And The Future Of Human Reproduction*.

In the fight against the disease, one approach uses genetic engineering to reduce, or even eliminate, populations of malaria-carrying mosquitoes – for example, by modifying males to ensure that all their offspring are infertile. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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OBITUARIES

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **John 3:16**



Dorothy Bogaars (nee Lee Kian Neo)
12th April 1931 - 8th February 2019

A generous, strong, and independent woman
Passed away peacefully at Assisi Hospice, aged 87

Wife of the late George Edwin Bogaars
Beloved Mother and Mother-in-law of Josephine and Gus; Elizabeth;
Paulina and Brian; Christina and Steven; Michael and Lynn

Grandmother and Grandmother-in-law of Craig and David; Katja and Tim; Paul;
Adele, Audrey, and Ian; Matthew and Timothy

Great-grandmother of Amelia and Camden; Kashi; Kali and Freyja

Treasured Aunt to Choo Chye Neo
Special place in the heart of Elizabeth Cautivar Perjes, her caregiver

Wake is held at Singapore Casket, Topaz Hall, Level 4,
131 Lavender Street, Singapore 338737 from Sunday 10th February, 3.00pm onwards

Nightly prayers will be held at 8pm
Funeral Mass will be held at St. Bernadette's Church, 12 Zion Road, Singapore 247731
on 13th February, 1.00pm

Cortege leaves the church at 2.00pm for Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 3.00pm

The family requests no wreaths please



WONG NIN HUP

Age: 86

passed away peacefully on 8 February 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered
by loved ones.

Wife: Lai Kwai Kheng

Son:

Wong Wing Sun

Daughters:

Wong Kwan Wye

Wong Chee Wye

Grandsons:

Wong Jia Wei

Wong Sze Chew

Teo Meng Hwee Timothy

all relatives and friends

Wake is held at Blk 170 Stirling Road
S'pore 140170 Mult-Purpose Hall
Cortege will leave on Monday, 11 February 2019
at 2pm for Kong Meng San Phor Kark See
Monastery for cremation at 3pm.

17TH ANNIVERSARY IN LOVING MEMORY OF



TEO LAY SWEET
Departed on 10th February 2002

A loving Husband
caring Father and
a dear Friend

Deeply missed by Wife Susie Yeo,
Children and all Loved Ones.



K. Manoranjeetham (Manor)

Age: 58

Passed away peacefully on

8 February 2019.

Deeply missed by her

dearest family and friends.

Amma is resting at Block 498L

Tampines Street 45 #02-480,

Singapore 528498 Tel: 5383 9626

Cortege leaves on Sunday

10 February 2019 at 5.00pm

for Mandai Crematorium

Hall 1.



TANG SHET CHUN

Departed 10/02/09

Eternal Joy

Noble Deeds And

Lasting Memories

Always Remembered
by Loved Ones

Obituaries

For enquiries,
call

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(weekdays 8.30am
to 6.30pm)

6319-5192

ST Classifieds

AUM NAMA SHIVAYA



In loving memory of a very Dear Son, Husband, Father
MR MURUGASVARANA S/O SANGARA PILLAY
30 November 1969 - 22 January 2018
The 1st year Thevasam Prayers will be held on
10th FEBRUARY 2019 (SUNDAY)
between 8am - 11am at our residence
Block 129 Bukit Merah View, #15-158,
Singapore 150129, followed by lunch at 1pm.
Athma Shanti Pratanai will be held on the same day
at 7pm at Sri Sivan Temple, 24 Geylang East Avenue 2,
Singapore 389752.
Please treat this as a PERSONAL invitation.
Dearly missed & forever remembered by mother, wife,
daughter and loved ones.

10th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Rasammal d/o K Murugasu
(Wife of Late Ramu Packir)
Departed: 10 Feb 2009
Sadly missed by
daughter Ananthi Ramu
Family and relatives

PUEH TOR TIONG

Age: 86

passed away peacefully on 9 February 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Ng Sai Goon

Son:

Pueh Woei Horng

Daughters:

Pueh Jye Huey

Pueh Jye Fang

Grandchildren:

Chan Jing Wei Mervyn

Chan Jing Ren Miranda

Pueh Yue Xi Alyshea

and all relatives.

Wake is held at Blk 25 Teck Whye Lane Singapore 680025.
Cortege will leave on Wednesday, 13 February 2019
at 3.15pm for Mandai Crematorium Hall 4
for cremation at 4.15pm.

To honour the life of



Vengadasamy Rajoo

Departed on 3 February 2019

The family would like to express our heartfelt thanks and
appreciation to relatives and friends for your kind
assistance, attendance, condolences, wreaths and
contributions during our recent bereavement.

Athma Shanti Pooja will be held
on Monday, 11 February 2019 at 7.30pm at
SRI SRINIVASA PERUMAL TEMPLE (Serangoon Road).

Please treat this as a personal invitation.



**20th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Joseph Chan
Gim Siong**

Departed on 10 February 1999

No matter where we are
Your spirit will be beside us
For we know that no matter what
You will always be with us

Deeply missed by:

Mother, Wife, 3 Sons, 3 Daughters-in-law,
5 Grandchildren and loved ones.

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Invest



Me & My Money

Finance industry exec Vipin Kalra says people should start thinking about investments when they turn 20. **B12**

Raising kids to be money smart

The Chinese New Year provides a good opportunity to teach kids with hongbao to grow their cash



Lorna Tan

Invest Editor

The start of Chinese new year is not only a good time to spring clean our investment portfolios but also a golden opportunity to educate the children on good money habits.

As Chinese New Year typically falls within the first two months of the year, it is a timely reminder to parents to have conversations on money matters with their children before other priorities get in the way, says Mr Deepak Khanna, head of wealth development at HSBC Bank (Singapore). “In addition, this is probably the rare occasion where children will be given extra money ‘windfalls’ which are not part of their usual routine.

“This makes Chinese New Year an ideal opportunity to impart money management skills.”

Ms P’ing Lim, head of deposits and secured loans at DBS Bank, suggests parents have meaningful conversations with their children on having the right mindset for the handling of money, particularly hongbao, during this festive period.

“For example, they can encourage their children to set aside most of the money for long-term savings and for rainy days, while the rest can go into a pool to be used for a special occasion or goal, such as a birthday gift for their best friend or a personal treat,” she says.

“Such conversations become the preamble towards more formal discussions on financial planning when the child grows older.”

If the child doesn’t already have a savings account, consider opening one so they can deposit red packet money.

Ms Lim notes that deposits are usually higher during the Chinese New Year season due to parents putting red packet money in for their children. “Give your child a head start towards money management by starting a POSBkids savings account so that they can start monitoring their own savings and interest earned,” she says.

“During the festive season, we usually open 60 per cent more new



Mr Melvin Leong, 40, principal Consultant at IHSMarkit, with his wife Sinyee Yap, 35, a programme manager, and their children Olivia, six, and Quentin, three. The parents hope their children will learn to cherish what they have, show gratitude and not be wasteful. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

A piggy bank to kick-start a child’s savings journey

For finance executive Melvin Leong’s first child, it was a piggy bank that started the conversation rolling about good money habits.

Mr Leong, 40, had a couple of piggy banks around the house and daughter Olivia, now six, started to notice her parents putting coins in them.

He recalls: “Sometimes she would take the coins out to play and like all kids, she enjoyed putting the coins back too.

“From then on, it was a gradual process of showing her that coins have different values, followed by dollar notes, and then when she was proficient enough, we showed her how to add and subtract.”

Mr Leong, a principal consultant at IHSMarkit, is married to programme manager Sinyee Yap, 35, and they also have a three-year-old son Quentin.

The couple constantly remind their children to distinguish between their needs and wants.

More importantly, they wanted to inculcate in Olivia and Quentin the values that they should cherish what they have, show gratitude and not be wasteful.

To teach them the idea of deferred gratification, they set rules on things like having ice cream once a week and allowing the children to decide which day.

Olivia is in primary school this year so her parents have started giving her a daily allowance and her personal piggy bank for her savings. Mr Leong says: “We asked her to think about what she could do with the money she’s saved. For a start, it is saving for a bigger toy she’d like to get, but we hope to progress her to think about other things that may become important to her in future.”

As a sweetener, every dollar Olivia saves gets a 10 per cent upfront bonus from her father, so she has been rather enthusiastic.

Still, the couple try not to be too prescriptive on what Olivia can use her allowance on.

“We feel it would be better to let her find her way around and make mistakes. It is important that she learns that there are consequences with the decisions she takes,” says Mr Leong.

For instance, in the second week of school, Olivia spent a day’s allowance on stickers, but that fortunately was a one-off. She also tried buying food from the canteen, which most of the time ends up wasted as she is a slow eater with a small appetite.

Since then, Olivia has asked her mum to pack her a small snack for recess. That way, she gets to save her allowance in her piggy bank.

Mr Leong has bought a Tokio Marine endowment insurance plan with a \$200,000 sum assured for Olivia’s future education needs, and will set one up for Quentin soon.

The children also have had their Child Development Accounts since birth. Both are with OCBC.

Lorna Tan

children additional incentives if they hit their saving targets.

The Sunday Times highlights 10 tips for educating children on money matters.

1. Value of money

Mr Goh has started inculcating the discipline of saving in his two daughters.

“My elder daughter Isabelle has recently started school,” he says.

“What I try to do is to give her some perspective over the value of money, and I do this by linking the concept of money to everyday things she can relate to.

“So, if she is able to save 20 cents a day, I tell her that allows her to purchase a small packet of biscuits. But if she were to accumulate 20 cents daily over a week, she now has the option to buy a whole box of biscuits or other items.”

Mr Goh’s wife Crystal has given Isabelle a container for her savings. This helps her visualise that she is gradually working towards a chosen target.

Mr Goh adds that children between four and six may find it difficult to distinguish between needs and wants, so he tries to educate his children on the difference between enjoying a packet of biscuits on a one-time basis versus say, enjoying a book for the longer term.

“We try to weave in lessons on compassion and giving as well, by telling them part of their money can be used to contribute towards church activities, or to buy tissues from the disabled auntie on the streets.

“I’m still struggling if I should implement the concept of taxation, with me as the parent acting as the taxman, though!”

HABIT FOR LIFE continued on B15

Offerings from banks for parents

HSBC PREMIER LITE

The HSBC Premier Lite Savings account offers parents an opportunity to start saving early for their children.

To be eligible, the individual (resident/non-resident) must be at least aged 18 and a HSBC Premier customer while the child must be 18 and under. The minimum initial

deposit is \$1.

Visit <https://www.hsbc.com.sg/accounts/products/premier-lite/> for more details.

POSBKIDS ACCOUNT

This account offers an interest rate of 0.05 per cent with bonus interest on a tiered basis. For instance, the first \$350,000 earns an interest of 0.050 per cent, the next \$650,000 is 0.075 per cent while amounts above \$1 million will receive an interest of 0.1 per cent.

There is no minimum deposit and balance requirement until age 21. The age eligibility is 18 and under.

If you open a POSBkids account online up until Feb 28, you will get a \$18 hongbao from POSB when you deposit and maintain \$2,000 in your account for six months (March 1 to Aug 31). Visit www.posb.com.sg/posbkids for more details.

OCBC MIGHTY SAVERS ACCOUNT

This account offers an annual inter-

est of up to 0.8 per cent. To be eligible, the child must be 16 years old or under. There is no minimum deposit required.

Part of the benefits include a priority queue at bank branches on Sundays and exclusive promotional offers shared via e-newsletter OCBC Family Times.

Under the OCBC Mighty Savers CNY promotion, if you deposit \$500 to \$1,499 of fresh funds, you get a limited edition Mighty Savers pixel art pencil case. Save a mini-

mum of \$1,500 fresh funds and you get a limited edition Mighty Savers pixel art backpack.

UOB STASH ACCOUNT

Parents can start accumulating more savings for their children with the UOB Stash Account. This account encourages savings by rewarding bonus interest when the average deposit balance increases month on month.

From now to March 30, parents can maximise returns from their

children’s red packet money by entering the “Stash it, Cash in” promotion and get up to \$880 when they save with their Stash Account. Terms and conditions apply. See www.uob.com.sg for more details.

There is a minimum initial deposit requirement of \$1,000 and the child must be at least 15. There is a fall-below-fee of \$2 per month (below \$51,000 balance).

Lorna Tan

Managing cash well a good habit for life

FROM B16

2. Start early

It is never too early to start teaching children about money as it is vital to impart good management skills as young as possible. In fact, the concept of money management can be introduced once a child is able to count, says Mr Deepak.

"Parents can start with the concept of savings as a start, progressing to impart money management skills such as allocating their allowance to different spending when the child gets older," he advises.

"More importantly, this should always be an on-going conversation regardless of the child's age. Parents should consistently re-enforce the importance of not spending beyond your means."

3. Saving before spending

Once all the hongbao have been collected, get the children to take stock of how much they have accumulated. Then get them to put aside a significant part of this into a savings account before committing to any expenditure to instil the discipline of saving before spending, says Mr Goh.

Children should then be guided on how to spend the rest of their hongbao, he adds.

Mr Deepak suggests that parents take their children to the bank to deposit their "windfall".

"Explain to your kids that their money will grow when they leave it in the bank and show them the interest earned on the last deposited 'windfall' money.

"Make good use of this opportunity to educate them about the potential of postponing their immediate consumption to obtain a more desirable item. This will allow them to learn the concept of delayed gratification and patience."

4. Needs versus wants

One way to teach children the difference between "needs" and "wants" is perhaps to split the portion of hongbao available for spending into two pools. The needs pool should be significantly bigger than the wants pool, perhaps a 70-30 split.

Sit down with your children to explain the difference between needs and wants. Tell them to make a wish list and go through it with them to distinguish between items that are needs or wants.

Needs would be things they cannot do without while wants are items they can do without which make them happy.

So if your children are going to take up swimming lessons, then they need to buy swimming costumes if they don't already have one or their current ones do not fit. Children may also want to buy toys or an extra pair of shoes or slippers because they liked something they saw.

Go ahead and allow them to buy these things from the pool of funds set aside for their needs and wants once they have set aside enough to meet the cost of the purchases.

This simple activity gets your children to evaluate the importance of the items they plan to spend their money on and rethink how they can plan their finances wisely.

5. Lead by example

Mr Deepak notes that parents have great influence as their children tend to model themselves on how their parents behave.

For example, parents could demonstrate the "needs" versus "wants" lesson by letting their children see them saying "no" to something that they desire.

Similarly, parents should encourage their children to delay instant gratification by imparting the merits of comparing prices before making a purchase.

"Most importantly, parents should be mindful of encouraging the association of shopping trips as leisure activities for the family. This may unconsciously encourage their children to associate spending money as fun, and that money is unlimited," he says.

"Another way would be to leverage garage sales to demonstrate the concept of working in exchange for money.

"Children need to contribute and put in effort to sell some of their old toys or books or even

help with making items such as cookies for sale. This will give them a better understanding of the correlation between effort and reward.

6. Leverage daily life and family holidays

Parent should explain different concepts of money with clear examples. Some of the money concepts include earning, saving, spending, borrowing, budgeting, investing and so on, says Mr Deepak.

"Teaching through real-life situations and examples will help children better understand these concepts - where money comes from, how it is earned and how it can be used," he adds.

"Trips to banks/ATMs or supermarkets are a good way to help children understand costs versus value; currencies and denominations; savings versus spending. Parents can also use overseas family holidays to explain the concept of foreign currencies and exchange."

7. Budgeting

UOB's Ms Chung suggests the use of labelled piggy banks to teach children about budgeting.

"One way is to split their pocket money in the following ways: 40 per cent goes towards everyday spending; 40 per cent towards a short-term savings goal such as buying a toy; and 20 per cent towards a long-term savings goal such as buying a bicycle," she suggests.

8. Make saving fun

Some children respond better to visual stimulus and one way to make saving fun and visual is to apportion hongbao that is available for spending into "savings jars", advises Mr Goh.

"The larger jars can be for wishes that require more savings (like a trip to Universal Studios), while the smaller jars can be for a specific toy. Encourage children to save any money collected throughout the year in the savings jars," he says.

"This activity is visually stimulating and will help your children to understand that some items take a longer time to save for."

9. Investing

Parents can consider investing on their children's behalf early on, says DBS' Ms Lim.

This can be a teaching tool for their children to learn concepts such as how the amount invested, the horizon and time value should reflect their financial goals.

In addition, highlight the importance of having a diversified portfolio as soon as one's child begins to learn about investing.

"Some investment options include the POSB Invest-Saver, where you can start investing into either Singapore Bonds or blue chip stocks via two exchange-traded funds listed on the Singapore Exchange from as low as \$100 monthly," she adds.

"This allows investors to start an investment portfolio and begin investing regularly, with a modest amount of funds, instead of trying to speculate on the "right" time to enjoy potentially higher returns."

10. Child Development Account (CDA)

Parents are encouraged to make full use of the CDA, which is a special savings account for children up to age 12, where the Government matches deposits dollar for dollar up to \$3,000 each, depending on the child's birth order.

You can open a CDA with the three local banks. No initial deposit is required and there are no fees for maintaining the account. The banks pay up to 2 per cent a year in interest on all balances with no deposit cap, so it makes sense to top up the accounts.

CDA funds can be used for educational and healthcare expenses at Baby Bonus-approved institutions, including clinics, childcare centres and kindergartens.

lorнатan@sph.com.sg

• Join Invest Editor Lorna Tan for her talk on retirement planning via CPF at Agape Village, multi-purpose hall, level 1, 7A Lorong 8 Toa Payoh, from 7.30pm on Feb 22. To register, please e-mail agapevillage@caritassingapore.org or call 6801-7400.



Teacher Chong Keng Kok, 51, and his wife Tham Miaw Ling, 42, believe in educating their children Xin Yue, 12, and Guang Yang, nine, about money management early. For example, when the children turned six, they were allowed to pay for things to learn about the value of money. ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

Daily experiences offer opportunities to show value of money

Teacher Chong Keng Kok, 51, and his housewife wife Tham Miaw Ling used to deposit their two children's hongbao into their savings accounts when they were younger.

When the children - aged 12 and nine now - entered primary school, the couple encouraged them to save most of the cash while setting aside an amount for a treat or to buy things they like.

Last year, Mrs Chong, 42, started advising them to donate part of their hongbao to charity after reading a parent's post on the POSB Smart Buddy Community.

"It got me thinking about my

children doing their bit for charity, as my husband is a regular volunteer at a nursing home," says Mrs Chong.

"Since then, I have suggested to the kids that they set aside part of their hongbao for the volunteers to organise events for the beneficiaries. I hope they can continue with this practice every year," she said.

The couple believe in educating their children about money management early and through daily experiences, as they believe all habits - good or bad - start from a young age.

They seldom buy unnecessary ("wants") items for their children. They instead try to instil the value of money by asking the children why they need the item before making the purchase.

"The key here is for them to understand the 'why'.

Mr Chong recalls: "There was once when my daughter Xin Yue, 12, who is a voracious reader, wanted to buy storybooks.

"I told her it is not possible as she already has so many books at home and we are running out of bookshelf space. And since she finishes a book so quickly, it made sense for her to borrow from the library instead."

When the children reached the age of six, they were allowed to pay for things to learn about the value of money. They were both given individual money pouches for when they shopped for groceries with their parents.

They used to have piggy banks but now the couple employ the POSB Smart Buddy app to trans-

fer excess pocket money back to the children's savings accounts. Occasionally, they will log in and let their children see how much they have saved.

Mr Chong encourages his children to buy Smart Buddy stamps from the school bookshop.

"I explained to them that once they have completed the stamp card, POSB will top up \$1, which is equivalent to 10 per cent interest. No other bank is giving such high secured interest.

"I explain to them the concept of interest as 'the bank will reward you when you save money with them'."

The couple do not have any investment plans for the children, but they diligently put some money away in a few term deposit accounts for their future.



Mr Jeffrey Ha, 43, and wife Colleen Ng, 36, with their children (from left) Janine, eight, Ariel, six, and Joshua, two. The couple decided it was "most appropriate" to start teaching about money when the children enter primary school as they could pay for items such as food during recess. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Using recess, board games to teach about saving for a rainy day

Educators Jeffrey Ha, 43, and wife Colleen Ng, 36, believe in teaching their three children about good money habits and concepts such as saving and spending.

The couple decided it was "most appropriate" to start the process when the children enter primary school because they would have the opportunity to pay for items such as food during recess and learn about making purchases

and receiving change.

"When they enter primary school, we provide each of them a piggy bank," says Mr Ha.

"We would distribute the loose change we receive from our daily purchases to the kids, who would deposit the money into their piggy banks. Through the act of depositing, we are able to teach them the need to save for a rainy day."

Their daughters, Ariel, six, and Janine, eight, are in lower primary and get a daily allowance of \$2.

The girls are encouraged to save what's left of their allowance into

their piggy banks.

"We would ask them what they had for recess daily, and also the balance amount at the end of each day, which would be deposited into their piggy banks," said Mr Ha.

"We also teach our daughters to portion 10 per cent of their weekly allowance for tithing every week," he added.

The couple also teach their children about how their savings can be used to buy presents for special occasions, such as their mother's birthday, or to purchase items they misplace or lose.

The family plays board games like Monopoly and Payday to better understand the concepts of saving and spending.

As Joshua is only two, his parents save the money from his red packets on his behalf.

Mr Ha says his children's savings are parked in their individual Child Development Account with UOB.

He also bought an investment-linked insurance policy from Prudential which comes with a monthly premium of \$100, with the objective of saving for their education.

Earned income relief

Age as of Dec 31 in preceding year	\$
Below 55	1,000
55 to 59	6,000
60 and above	8,000

Source: BDO TAX ADVISORY
SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

The Government may want to consider increasing the earned income relief further to incentivise seniors to remain in the workforce as long as their health permits, says the writer. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG



Silver workforce: Working past the age of retirement

Higher earned income relief and a silver tax rebate may incentivise more to keep working



Wu Soo Mee

The recurring topic of Singapore's ageing population and its effects is now more real than ever as the

Merdeka generation (born in the 1950s) now enters retirement age. With improved healthcare over the past decades, members of this generation are generally more healthy and able-bodied at their current age compared with their predecessors. Thus, many at the age of retirement still find themselves fully able to carry on their employment beyond the age of 62. Many of these individuals are continuing to do so as our silver workforce. This generation has lived

through Singapore's independence struggle with no natural resources to build the economy of our country and has witnessed the rapid progress of Singapore through hard work and endurance. Their experience is unique and they have much to pass on to the younger workforce. If the silver workers who are now entering retirement are able to remain in the workforce for a few additional years, they will be able to utilise their years of valuable experience to continue mentoring and guiding the next generation of leaders. This enables the Singapore economy to continue thriving and prevents gaps in experience level in the

professional workforce where the upcoming leaders are much younger than the current leaders who are soon retiring. The Government has been consistently increasing its support for the ageing population via various schemes. The Government recognises the positive effects of extending the ageing individuals' time in the workforce and it has over the years increased the statutory retirement age. Perhaps more can be done to encourage the silver workers to stay in the workforce. **ACTIVE AGEING** Continuing to be in employment to be part of the silver workforce helps

with active ageing. Staying employed engages the silver workers' mental and physical capacities, leading to benefits such as a longer life and healthier body and mind. The positive health effects of active ageing reduce financial burden on not only the families, but also on the Government. The costs of providing health and social care to a maturing population can be significant. A healthy maturing population reduces the financial burden on the Government and society; such costs saved may be used to support other initiatives that contribute towards active ageing, which in turn helps to build a healthier maturing population.

TAX INCENTIVES

1. Higher earned income relief (EIR) for those 60 and above
Currently, the EIR is \$1,000 for those aged below 55 as at Dec 31 in the preceding year. It increases to \$6,000 for those between 55 and 59 and \$8,000 for those 60 and above. Although the increase in EIR for the older workers will make up, to some extent, for the reduction in the Central Provident Fund (CPF) relief, the Government may want to consider increasing the EIR further to incentivise these senior individuals to remain in the workforce as long as their health permits. This may result in a bigger take-home pay for every dollar they earn as a silver worker compared with when they were younger. With the current retirement age of 62 in mind, and taking into consideration that the silver workers who are highly experienced professionals will be in the tax-paying bracket, the Government could increase the earned income relief to \$15,000 for those 60 and above to create a favourable tax impact for the silver workers.

2. Silver tax rebate
The Government may wish to consider giving further fiscal incentive to silver workers to stay in the workforce with a "silver tax rebate". Although it may be said that most of these professional silver workers will be less attracted by more cash in the pocket, having specific tax incentives just for them, in a way, is a form of recognition of their worth and the value of their experience in the workforce. This may be more meaningful to these individuals than cash in the bank.

BUDGET 2019
As more and more silver workers will retire in the next few years, we hope to see more tax benefits to incentivise the able and experienced to continue working past retirement age. As senior citizens stay longer in the workforce, companies can continue to grow with the more experienced workforce remaining longer to contribute towards the businesses and to nurture the younger workforce, helping to narrow the experience gap between younger and older workers. • The writer is executive director, people tax advisory, BDO Tax Advisory.



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Episode

6

Getting up close and personal with

Saad Saleh Al Saleh

Ambassador of
the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
to Singapore



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Fund manager interview series

Taking the pain out of fund investment

Silverdale Capital founder and chief investment officer Sanjay Guglani discusses his outlook in the latest of our series featuring fund managers and leading market experts.



Lorna Tan

Invest Editor

Mr Sanjay Guglani manages about \$1 billion across a dozen funds, including Silverdale Bond Fund. He started his entrepreneurial career in 1994 as founder-managing director of the Saksham Group, which was at the time one of the largest external fund managers in India.

He also went on to establish Saksham Financial Services – one of the largest wealth management companies in India, retailing funds and insurance products.

He was instrumental in setting up capital market ventures for SRF Finance, now GE Capital, and in managing one of the largest cash-futures arbitrage books in India. He was also involved in various private equity transactions.

Mr Guglani is a chartered accountant, management accountant, company secretary and Sloan Fellow of Management from London Business School (as British Chevening Scholar).

Q Tell us about Silverdale Bond Fund?

A Silverdale Bond Fund is an open-ended bond fund, investing in investment-grade bonds and leveraging these to achieve superior risk-adjusted returns. We have been doing this for a decade and have honed this strategy to perfection. It is available to accredited investors.

It invests in a well-diversified portfolio of primarily investment-grade US dollar bonds with short duration of two to three years, returning 8 per cent to 9 per cent per annum for its investors, making it a top decile bond fund in the world.

It has won accolades from Wealth-BriefingAsia (2018), AI Hedge Funds (2016) and Wealth & Finance (2016), and been ranked by Bloomberg among the top five Asian funds in 2015.

Q How does leverage enhance investor returns?

A Well, if you invest \$100 in Silverdale Bond Fund, the fund would borrow, say, \$200 from the bank and invest a total of \$300. While the fund will pay interest on the loan of



As all ecosystems will fail at some time, Silverdale Capital founder Sanjay Guglani works at building up protection for his firm's investors. "We are always on our toes, deeply cognisant of idiosyncratic risks," he says. PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

\$200, it would earn higher return on the entire \$300. Thus, enhance the returns. It is similar to buying a house on mortgage with rental being more than mortgage interest.

Q Isn't taking leverage risky, especially in the current volatile market situation?

A Leverage can actually provide superior risk-adjusted returns. Many investors do not understand leverage – when to use, how to use and how much to use – and hence deem it to be risky.

This leverage aversion results in arbitrage gains for those who understand it. Simply put, if you created a 60/40 balanced portfolio of 60 per cent equity and 40 per cent bonds, then approximately 80 per cent of your portfolio returns and your portfolio risks come from equity allocation.

Thus, it is not truly "balanced". For exactly the same level of risk (technically, "risk parity"), if you replace half of your equity allocation with leveraged bonds, your returns could increase by 20 per cent to 30 per cent.

It is estimated that almost US\$1 trillion (\$\$1.4 trillion) is currently invested in risk parity anchored portfolios. Hence, on Aug 8 last year, S&P launched the Risk Parity Index. The point to note is that we

started using risk parity in essence 10 years earlier.

Q How do you manage the risks that rising interest rates pose to bonds?

A Contrary to conventional wisdom, an increase in interest rate is actually good news for a short duration bond fund, due to three key reasons.

First, our portfolio earns around 5 per cent in interest coupons. Increasing interests imply these coupons get invested at increasingly higher interest rates.

Second, with over 120 bonds with weighted average duration of less than two years, every month we receive maturity proceeds from several bonds, which get redeployed at higher rate of interest.

Third, an increase in interest rates increases the spread between borrowing cost and bond yields, resulting in higher spread income. This strategy would not work in the case of longer duration bond funds or poor quality of credits.

Q What are the main reasons investors should invest in Silverdale Bond Fund?

A Silverdale Bond Fund has provided returns of 8 per cent per annum over the past five years. The fund pays a dividend of US\$8 per share, which is about 6 per cent per

annum dividend yield, providing periodic cash-flow for the investors.

It's an open-ended fund, so investors can subscribe or redeem from the fund any week. You would be surprised to know that unlike most funds, our fact sheets provide details of our trades, and that too on a weekly basis.

As interest rates go up, the fund returns are likely to improve with a short lag of time, while if the interest rates fall, the fund returns are likely to improve front-loaded. While no investment is completely free of embedded risks, leveraged bonds generally provide superior risk-adjusted returns.

Q While evaluating fixed income opportunities, what should an Asian investor do in 2019?

A The recent financial market volatility has highlighted the sensitivity of asset prices to rising rates and the withdrawal of central bank liquidity. This is typical of a late-cycle environment where volatility and credit spreads tend to widen. However, there are no signs of an imminent recession, given the historically low unemployment rate driving up consumer confidence, consumption and wage-inflation.

While markets are not pricing any Fed rate hike in 2019, investors would do well to budget for one

rate hike. Hence, investors should stick to high quality bonds with short maturities. Any downturn in the economy could make companies with weak financials vulnerable since their ability to bear adverse change in such an economic environment is very low. As credit spreads widen, short-duration bonds provide opportunities to reinvest the interest coupons and bond maturities for increasingly higher returns.

Further, as the US dollar appreciates against other currencies, due to flight to safety or higher returns or otherwise, investments in US dollar-denominated assets provide higher returns.

Sectorally, the oil and gas sector, gold companies, multibillion-dollar tech companies, and high reset AT1 (bank capital) bonds of banks with high capital adequacy look attractive.

Geographically, select high quality Chinese credits look interesting given the easing in local funding and announced support measures for the economy. Select Indonesian credits still have value. For those with a high-risk appetite post-Brexit, British credits would provide several opportunities.

Q Could you share other funds from Silverdale House?

A Innovation is what drives us. Besides our unique internally-leveraged open-ended bond fund, we have a pioneer fund of native Indian mutual funds capitalising on the advantages of domestic Indian mutual funds that pay zero capital gains tax and zero tax on dividend income, while foreign funds pay over 20 per cent to 35 per cent tax.

Additionally, unlike Indian mutual fund investors, our investors do not suffer any capital gains tax on sale of fund units.

We also have a unique technology fund. Rather than pretending to understand the entire tech sector, which nobody can, we are using big data analytics to pick the best funds, using factor-based triangulation. Further, we clip coupons from fixed coupon notes on tech stocks and use them to buy protection on underlying funds; thus, using volatility to our advantage.

In addition, we have a few innovative bespoke funds for large institutions and family offices to cater to their unique requirements with the ring-fenced structure, robust risk management, and institutional pricing for leverage, brokerage, custody and so on.

Q What keeps you awake at night?

A While we run relatively safe strategies, we are paranoid about risk. We go with the belief that all ecosystems will fail at some time. The strength we need to build is to be able to protect our investors when any ecosystem fails.

Hence, we have triple layers of assurances and built-in redundancies. We are always on our toes, deeply cognisant of idiosyncratic risks, which could mar our performance in the short term.

Q What would you be if you were not a fund manager?

A If not running a fund, I would be working full-time in financial education, a subject close to my heart and in which I indulge with students of Nanyang Polytechnic, Nanyang Technological University, National University of Singapore, Singapore Management University and so on.

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• Upgrade your financial literacy at a full-day seminar Financial Management Day, which is supported by MoneySense and the Institute for Financial Literacy. It is held from 9am to 5pm at Singapore Polytechnic Convention Centre, 500 Dover Road, on Feb 23. Admission is free. Visit progress2gether.sg to register.

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Invest

Me&MyMoney

It's about planning, property, portfolio

BankBazaar CEO, who has spent over 25 years in the finance sector, talks about three essential Ps



Lorna Tan

Invest Editor

Money has meant different things to Mr Vipin Kalra at different phases of his life but it has always performed a fundamental purpose – as a means to an end.

Mr Kalra, 52, has spent more than 25 years in the finance industry and so has a sharp sense about the essential role cash can play in our lives.

He told The Sunday Times: “I think you go through different phases in life. There are times, perhaps when you're younger, when money is about enjoying all the luxuries and material things.

“For me, as I grow older, money is now a means of having financial freedom and security, and providing for my family.”

Mr Kalra is chief executive of BankBazaar International, an online marketplace for consumers to compare and apply for financial products like credit cards and loans.

He spent half of his life in India before migrating to Australia where he took up citizenship. He is also a Singapore Permanent Resident.

He says that if he wants to retire in Australia, he would need to plan for income of at least AUD\$60,000 to AUD\$100,000 (\$\$58,000 to \$\$96,000) a year. He adds that it is also important that his home is mortgage-free in order to live within this budget.

“It's important to note that we're living longer and will likely have to live without a regular income for 30 years after we retire,” he adds.

In order to determine how much is needed, one should calculate the annual budget and multiply it by about 30, and then factor in inflation (roughly around 3 per cent), he says.

He joined BankBazaar International in May 2017, after 11 years with Visa. He graduated with a degree in electrical and electronics engineering from the YMCA Institute of Engineering in India in 1988.

He is married to Australian Anna Kalra, 39, a housewife, and they have two boys, ages 19 and 14.

Q What is your investing strategy for your business?

A We're a neutral online marketplace for consumers to search, compare and instantly apply for financial products such as credit cards and loans. By using our technology platform, consumers can get products that fit their needs, with a fast application process and free of any costs.

BankBazaar was founded in India in 2010. However, the birth of BankBazaar International took place only in 2016, with the setting up of BankBazaar Singapore.

BankBazaar International expanded further last year, with the launch of BBazaar Malaysia. We have invested a little over \$10 million into the international business over the last two years, with the plan to have each market stand on its own feet within three years.

Q What's the next stage of growth for your businesses?



A Our strategy to grow the international business is to go broader and deeper in the markets that we're in, and also add more markets to the mix.

In our existing markets, we'd like to work with more partners and grow the product portfolio (currently credit cards, personal loans and debt consolidation) to include insurance and investments. We're also working towards expanding our international footprint, with plans to expand to Australia, Hong Kong and other South-east Asian nations over the next five years.

Q What's in your investment portfolio?

A I believe in a balanced portfolio. I like to have a good chunk of money invested in real estate because that's an asset that grows in capital value. Positively-geared property can create positive income.

I have four properties, all of them in Australia (three in Sydney and one in Melbourne). I am renting them out. Only one of them is fully paid up.

I also invest in stocks. At my age, I don't invest as much in high-growth companies, as the returns can be volatile. I invest largely in blue-chip companies, as the returns tend to be stable and higher. And the rest goes towards my retirement through my superannuation in Australia.

Worst and best bets

Q What has been your biggest investing mistake?

A My biggest lesson came from my stock investments. I learnt that it's best not to panic and make impulse decisions when the market drops. That's the time to buy, not to sell. It took me a long time to get there.

My Apple stock was a classic case. I bought stocks over two years ago, the market dropped

The division is roughly 60:20:20 for now but it is likely to change to 60:10:30 as I grow older. As you grow older, the risk appetite reduces and your portfolio should match your risk appetite. Ideally, if you're 50 plus, you should increase the percentage that goes to retirement to over 30 per cent.

Stocks are a volatile investment, there is high risk and high returns. For instance, with the current fluctuations in the US stock market, all the gains made over the last 18 months have been wiped out. It's been touted as the worst December since The Great Depression.

Property falls somewhere in between, with medium risk and returns. Property is a long-term investment. Although there are ups and downs, the value stabilises over time. Central Provident Fund is typically safest.

Q What are your immediate investment plans?

A As mentioned above, my immediate investment plan is to move more towards safer havens. Given the market turmoil, it is fairly risky to invest in things like stocks and I'd rather shift my investments towards my retirement fund.

Q How did you get interested in investing?

A I actually started quite late, I was 30-plus already when I started. I

soon after and I sold my stock. It then ended up doubling in value. Timing is everything.

Q And your best investment?

A Investing in my properties. I own four investment properties now and stretching myself at the point of buying those has yielded great returns.

Lorna Tan

started with my first property investment – a three-bedroom townhouse – in Sydney in 1995. At that point, living in Australia, it was everyone's dream to own their own house, so that's how it started for me too.

Even though it was somewhat beyond my reach, I took the plunge. It was harder in the first few years. I gave up my credit cards to reduce my credit exposure and secure a higher loan amount. But the sacrifice was well worth it and it paid off for me.

I bought the property for roughly AUD\$300,000 and its value almost doubled by the time I sold it about seven years later.

I got into stocks much, much later. It started when I opened an account with Commonwealth Bank and they had a trading arm that opened the door for me. I started experimenting with AUD\$2,000 but I didn't make any money on that.

The real investment in stocks started when I joined Visa and Visa went public. We were given stock by the company and that pushed me deeper into managing the Visa stock and expanding my portfolio from there.

Q Describe your investing strategy.

A I strongly recommend that one should start thinking about investments, especially property investments, when they turn 20. Property is increasingly becoming less affordable and starting off earlier will give you better benefits.

For those who are not that experienced or don't want to be actively involved, you can go with a managed fund. However, it is important to be aware of the fee structure. Most managed funds charge a high fee (between 1 and 2 per cent). One can also look at exchange-traded funds because they play on the index, they're more passive and therefore their fee structure is lower.

Q What else is in your financial plan?

A In addition to the retirement

fund, I do have a trust for my family. I have worked with lawyers to draft a will, so that, if something were to happen to me, all my assets are allocated properly.

Even if you're in the best of health, I would advise you to think about a will, as you don't want your dependants to face any hassles when making claims to your assets.

Q How are you planning for retirement?

A How much we need for retirement depends totally on our lifestyle and how we want to live in our later years.

It's important to note that we're living longer and will likely have to live without a regular income for 30 years after we retire. To determine how much is needed, one should factor in inflation in the calculations.

The definition of retirement is fluid these days. I expect to slow down when I'm 60, but I will likely keep working in some capacity (as an adviser, teacher or consultant) till 70 to 75, if my health permits.

Q Home is now ...

A I realised, when I was moving, that Singapore is even more expensive than Australia. There are additional costs for foreigners buying property. I was in a phase of my life where luxuries like owning a house and car were not as important as saving.

Hence, while I had my own four-bedroom house in Sydney Australia, I downsized when I moved here. I stay in a rented three-bedroom condo in Orchard Road.

Q I drive ...

A When I was in Australia, I used to drive a BMW. With the significant expenses involved in owning a car in Singapore, I decided against buying one when I moved here.

Instead, I can manage very easily with ride-hailing services such as Grab.

lornatan@sph.com.sg

For BankBazaar International's chief executive officer Vipin Kalra, seen here with his wife Anna Kalra, money is a means of having financial freedom and security, and providing for his family.
ST PHOTO

FinancialQuotient

What is credit risk in bonds?

Zhang Weina and Ruth Tan

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Credit risk is a critical risk component embedded in bonds. It comprises default risk and recovery risk

for these bonds which usually offer investors fixed periodic interest payments and principal payback at maturity.

The default risk represents the probability that the promised interest or principal payments may not

be made by the issuer. In the case of late or missing payments, the recovery risk refers to how much the investors would eventually receive from the issuer at the final settlement.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Commonly observed bonds in Singapore may include Singapore Government Securities (SGS), Singapore Savings Bonds (SSB), government agency bonds (such as bonds issued by the HDB, Central Provident Fund Board and so on) and corporate bonds. Although the credit risk is a common risk embedded in them, the exact magnitude of the risk is not apparent to investors as it is not mentioned explicitly.

The starting point to understand credit risk would be using the credit ratings provided by third-party international rating agencies such as Standard & Poor's, Moody's or Fitch.

The credit rating grades assigned by the agencies give a reasonable range of the relative level of credit risk which is mapped to different default probabilities and recovery rates computed by the agencies using historical data.

Although different agencies use different alphabet grades, they are comparable, ranging from the highest (for example, AAA or Aaa) to the lowest grade (for example, D represents “default”). Since the Singapore Government resides in the

highest possible rating category (that is, AAA), the credit risk related to SGS, SSB and other government agency bonds will be at the minimum.

However, credit risk is much less transparent for corporate bonds, especially when they were not rated (that is, about half of the bonds issued in Singapore in 2016).

For international bond issuers, investors may use the credit default swap spreads to find out the level of credit risk embedded in the bonds. But such market benchmarks are not always available for local bonds.

The lack of trading activity in the secondary market makes the credit risk even less transparent for investors. Another way to assess the

credit risk would be to examine the yield promised. The higher the yield compared with that from the SGS or SSB with similar maturity would indicate a higher level of credit risk.

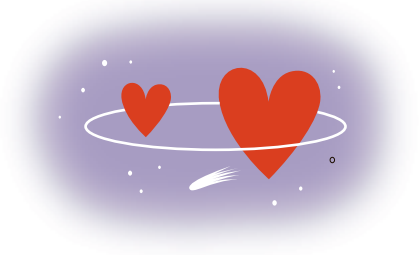
IF YOU WANT TO USE THE TERM, JUST SAY:

“Credit risk should be carefully assessed by lenders as it is an indication of the risk that they may not receive the owed principal and interest from the borrower.”

• Dr Zhang Weina is Senior Lecturer and Ruth Tan is Associate Professor, both in the Department of Finance at National University of Singapore Business School.

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Lilian Pinto, 39

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MODERN

LOVE

On the weekend before Valentine’s Day, **The Sunday Times** uncovers unconventional unions that have stood the test of time, the new rules of online dating and five quirky date spots.

• Japanese women seeking Singaporean husbands C6

• Best cafes for romance in Paris C15

• Aphrodisiacs tried and tested C19

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1 March 2019 | 7pm | Violet Oon Singapore
\$119.20++ (Citi Cards) | \$149.00++ (Other payment modes)
Each diner will be presented with a bottle of Handpicked Regional Selection Rosé worth \$48.

The Flavours of Asia Culinary Workshop
2 March 2019 | 10am, 12pm, 2pm and 4pm | ToTT Cooking Studio
\$20.00++ (Citi Cards) | \$25.00++ (Other payment modes)

An Evening at PeraMakan with Veramonte Wines
5 March 2019 | 7pm | PeraMakan
\$94.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$118.00++ (Other payment modes)

INFINITI presents A World of Spice with Jack Daniel's and Woodford Reserve Whiskies at The Song of India
6 March 2019 | 7pm | The Song of India
\$86.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$108.00++ (Other payment modes)

Lianhe Zaobao presents The GlenDronach Dinner at Huat Kee
7 March 2019 | 7pm | Huat Kee
\$216.00++ (Citi Cards) | \$270.00++ (Other payment modes)
Each diner will be presented with a bottle of The GlenDronach Original 12 Years worth \$138.

The Straits Times presents a Celebration Dinner at Spring Court with Handpicked Wines
12 March 2019 | 7pm | Spring Court
\$170.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$213.00++ (Other payment modes)
Each diner will be presented with a bottle of Handpicked Regional Selection Pinot Noir worth \$48.

Hashida presents an Omakase Evening with Premium Gins, Ferdinand's, The London No.1 and MOM
13 March 2019 | 7pm | Hashida Sushi Singapore
\$458.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$573.00++ (Other payment modes)
Each diner will be presented with a bottle of Ferdinand's Saar Dry Gin worth \$99.

The Signature Creations of BLOSSOM with Handpicked Wines
14 March 2019 | 7pm | BLOSSOM
\$198.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$248.00++ (Other payment modes)

A Taste of Exquisite Malay Cuisine with Aziza
19 March 2019 | 7pm | Grand Hyatt Singapore
\$94.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$118.00++ (Other payment modes)

Award-winning Author Bryan Koh presents "O451 MB: An Evening of Food from His Books", Accompanied by Woodford Reserve Cocktails
21 March 2019 | 7pm | Auntie's Wok and Steam | Andaz Singapore
\$102.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$128.00++ (Other payment modes)

A Late Night Supper at JB Ah Meng with Veramonte Wines
22 March 2019 | 10pm | JB Ah Meng
\$46.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$58.00++ (Other payment modes)

Majestic presents a High Aged Expression Whisky Dinner with The GlenDronach, Glenglassaugh and BenRiach
26 March 2019, Tuesday | 7pm | Majestic Restaurant
\$142.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$178.00++ (Other payment modes)

A Private Dining Experience with Tinoq and Handpicked Wines
27 March 2019 | 7pm | Private dining
\$142.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$178.00++ (Other payment modes)

An Evening of Cantonese Treasures at Peach Blossoms with Orin Swift
28 March 2019 | 7pm | Peach Blossoms
\$150.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$188.00++ (Other payment modes)

The Signature Cuisine of Famous Treasure with The GlenDronach and BenRiach
3 April 2019 | 7pm | Famous Treasure
\$238.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$298.00++ (Other payment modes)
Each diner will be presented with a Limited Edition bottle of The GlenDronach Cask Strength Batch 7 worth \$168.

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MODERN LOVE

MODERN LOVE

Crazy little thing called love



Mr Wu Derong dated Ms Dedeng Lopez (both above) after she left her job as a domestic helper in his home and started working for another Singaporean family. They have two children, aged 18 and 20. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

He married his former domestic helper

Love begins at home.

That was the sweet and also stormy experience of a Singaporean man and his former Filipino domestic helper who sailed against the tide to marry and are now parents.

Three decades ago, Mr Wu Derong was 17 when Ms Dedeng Lopez, then 27, started work at his family's semi-detached house in East Coast.

Ms Lopez treated her new employer's son like a younger sibling, especially since her own brother was the same age. Girls had crushes on the good-looking young man and she would routinely relay their phone calls to him at home. She had a boyfriend in the Philippines.

While Mr Wu would invite her to play the Boggle word game with his family and help her at the kitchen sink, she had no inkling that he had developed feelings for her over time.

Shortly before her four-year contract ended in 1994 – she was looking forward to nine months of rest in Manila while waiting for her next contract – he expressed his feelings for her.

Ms Lopez, now 57, recalls: "He said: 'I will follow you to the Philippines.'"

She was incredulous. "I was not rich. I was older," says the daughter of a Mindanao farmer and the fourth of 10 children.

Mr Wu has three siblings. She flew home and they wrote quaint aerogramme letters to each other twice a month, and she realised she was falling in love with him.

"She was my first relationship," says Mr Wu, now 47, who works in his family's small business where Ms Lopez also helps out part-time.

When she returned to work with

another Chinese Singaporean family, their courtship began.

On her fortnightly days off, they sometimes took walks in the parks. He also accompanied her to birthday parties and they took photos everywhere – activities that Filipinos enjoy, she recalls.

"I am easy-going," he says, adding that he blends into Filipino society. He understands Tagalog and snacks on fried day-old chicks and other delicacies that sometimes Filipinos hesitate to relish.

They married in 1998, their lonesome nuptials taking place in Manila's City Hall, as work-permit holders cannot marry in Singapore without approval from the Ministry of Manpower (MOM).

He was 27 and she was 37. He had doggedly begun the process, writing to his Member of Parliament and hand-delivering a letter to the authorities, but the outcome was still uncertain.

The newlyweds booked two tables at a Chinese restaurant to celebrate with her brother-in-law, niece and neighbours.

"I couldn't believe I was married," said Ms Lopez, who as a young woman reckoned that if she did not tie the knot by age 35, she would not marry at all.

Later that year, their son, now aged 20, was born in Manila. This time, his parents travelled there. There was no confinement period for the resilient new mother and she soon joined his family on a trip to Tagaytay city near the Taal Volcano, a two- to three-hour drive from the capital.

With the birth came new logistical dilemmas. His parents took their

side in a spartan space. "It was not so bad," he chimes in.

Her brothers showed him how they caught fish. They dammed a drainage system, bailed the water with a pail and extracted the fish. They also foraged for yam leaf shoots by the river.

"I am easy-going," he says, adding that he blends into Filipino society. He understands Tagalog and snacks on fried day-old chicks and other delicacies that sometimes Filipinos hesitate to relish.

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newborn to Singapore, while she would soon move to Johor Bahru for three months to stay with his family's friends. Her husband ferried the infant to the Malaysian city for visits and cuddles, before she went back to the Philippines alone.

Meanwhile, he had applied for their son's citizenship by descent for children of Singaporeans born overseas. Just before his first birthday, she could legally live in Singapore and the family is now together.

Mr Wu says: "Things were so uncertain. On the legal side, one part was God's grace and the other was having the know-how and re-

sources to structure the appeal."

He adds: "For me, Singapore is home and I wanted my son to grow up here. I registered for him to be a citizen by descent, though some parents may put it off till later. I had also gone to MOM when I wanted to get married and it had the record. I didn't hide anything."

The authorities also look at factors such as education and work experience. "Possess these factors and you are positioned in a more favourable light, in the eyes of the law," he adds.

Ms Lopez, who became a citizen in 2007, has imbibed Singaporean traits.

She likes chilli with her food. She still cooks orh nee, a Teochew yam-paste dessert, taught to her by her late father-in-law who treated her kindly.

Mr Wu had started his story by pointing out that their relationship took wing only after Ms Lopez left his family's employ. What might have been scandalous if they had not waited has turned out sweet, even storm-tossed.

As he contemplates their jagged journey and their marriage that he pictures as an imperfect work in progress, he reflects that status is a man-made construct.

"I always believe that when we are stripped of status, human needs are the same, whether it is love or filling the stomach."

"She's a cowboy," quips Mr Wu, who admires her as a gutsy one-time "country girl" who headed to Manila to work with a few pesos in her pocket. She was the first child to work overseas, blazing the path for her two sisters to work in Singapore.

They have now moved to Canada. "The ideal is to 'love reasonably'," he reckons.

They will genuinely love an addict through any number of relapses and even accept being cheated. He tells the men not to abuse their love, so they will not be ashamed to return.

Currently, there are 16 residents at The Hiding Place, which housed

en route to their honeymoon in Genting Highlands in 1980, The Hiding Place founders Philip and Christina Chan popped into Malaysian halfway houses that were similar to the centre they were running for drug offenders.

Their quest to rehabilitate addicts has bonded the dynamic duo for more than four decades.

Their love story began at The Hiding Place more than 40 years ago. She was then a young teacher at Anglo-Chinese School who had founded the halfway house in 1973, and he, a 22-year-old drug addict, was one of her residents.

Today, they are lions in winter, but Mr Chan, 68, and his wife, 72, still love and toil relentlessly for their marginalised residents who now also include gamblers, drinkers and wayward youths.

The couple live on a Choa Chu Kang farm with this huge family.

"As long as we live, we will open our door to anyone who knocks," says Mr Chan, citing the guiding principle for The Hiding Place.

He figures that 800 to 1,000 troubled men have knocked on their door since the halfway house was founded.

When he checked into the centre in 1973, Mr Chan was a salesman in his father's trading company and had pursued the "havo" life of drinking and playing darts with British servicemen stationed in Singapore. His drug-taking had started at 16 and he was now desperate to turn his life around.

"I was very strong-willed and tried to give up drugs more than 10 times. But I was hooked. Addicts

feel like failures," he recounts.

But after more than a month at the home, he had stopped smoking and hurling vulgarities, and was on the road to wholeness.

Brimming with gratitude and purpose, he started volunteering alongside Mrs Chan at the house she had rented in the Teachers' Estate neighbourhood near Upper Thomson Road with support from the Church.

The centre was rebranded The Hiding Place in 1978. "The feelings came along the way as we worked together," he says.

During the interview, he was also speaking for his wife, who had a stroke six years ago and lost much of her speech, though she whispers one-word prompts while he narrates their story and her face is radiant.

There is little clue that Mrs Chan, who has been using a wheelchair

for four years, was "fiery" in her prime and has been a pioneering advocate for the voiceless.

The boys were more afraid of her than of me. She was able to quieten them with words," Mr Chan says.

She stepped in when someone was lazy, for instance, as idleness was contagious.

Leaning tenderly into her from time to time, he says: "Christina has a big heart. She goes beyond herself to love anybody. Sometimes, I think she overdoes it – you need a balance."

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Lifetime bond in helping addicts

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”

MR PHILIP CHAN, who is wedded to The Hiding Place co-founder Christina Chan (both left)

The Hiding Place founders Philip and Christina Chan (both left) met more than 40 years ago, when he checked into a halfway house – which she founded – as a drug addict.

ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Like his wife, he is beset by illness. He was first diagnosed with colorectal cancer in 2006, then liver cancer a couple of years ago. He wears pouches for urinary and faecal waste.

Every day, they are honouring their wedding vows – in sickness and in health, until death do them part – he says.

"Life must not be looked at as always pleasant and good. There are seasons when we are active and energetic and give a lot. This is curtains down for us – a different time and season. We accept it," he adds.

He has been seeking a successor. Meanwhile, he has trained 11 ex-residents to work at the centre.

Sombrly, yet with a peace that shines through pain, he says: "We often lie on the bed at night and talk about who will go first. We say it's best if we go together."

Simple life for couple with naughty past

When high-spirited businesswoman and single mum Jackie Ong married Mr Daniel Chua, a driver who had spent 10 years behind bars for drug offences, they had already jettisoned their partying past.

Married now for seven years, they savour a simple life and accept their significant differences.

In her wilder days, Ms Ong, now 42, was a sweet-faced nightclub owner, but swore like a trooper and sported a dragon tattoo across half her back.

She opened her first karaoke club at age 21 when she was a young mother. A serial entrepreneur with as many as 13 businesses under her name – including a haute hawkster stall – she owned desirable properties, BMW rides and Chanel bags.

But she grew sick of the sleazy nightlife industry in the mid-2000s and reinvented her career.

She is now a partner in an interior design firm.

Her 48-year-old husband, who is more hesitant about revealing his past deeds, says in Mandarin that he experimented with designer drugs. A Primary 4 school dropout, he works as a driver and is planning for semi-retirement.

Before remarrying, Ms Ong was a single mother for 15 years and it was a life of highs and lows. The toughest part was dealing with "man talk" when her sons, now aged 16 and 22, were maturing physically. She also handled financial stresses alone.

"Any woman would be frightened about juggling a job and child-raising on her own," she says. "But

there is also joy. My sons were darlings. Because it was always just the three of us, we were very close."

She recalls with delight their travels to places like Hokkaido and Japan. In her younger days, she thought nothing of traipsing in high heels while carrying her younger son when he fell asleep on trips.

Before she married Mr Chua in 2011 – about three years after they met at a dinner in a Chinese restaurant hosted by mutual friends – one compelling factor was that he had taken the initiative to bond with her children.

Mr Chua and her younger son, for instance, loved sports and they would go to the beach or Wild Wild Wet water theme park in Pasti Ris.

She saw him as a father figure for her sons and embraced his companionship. "Two are better than one. You know you are not a superwoman when you are sick. He will deliver water and Panadol. He gives foot massages when I have migraine."

She also noticed his big heart for his elderly parents. Similarly, he was struck by how much she cared for her family, including her grandmother who is now 101 years old.

Mr Chua also lavishes praise on his wife: "Jackie is very generous. She's capable and she needs to get things done."

Though she earns 80 per cent of their household income and he feels unable to catch up, he salutes her success.

His admiration grows when people tell him her company is "blessing". She fills in the details. Contractors are often bruised by late payers or



Married couple Daniel Chua and Jackie Ong (both left) used to party hard when they were younger. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

abusive clients, but she pays on time and respects them.

She has shared her clientele base with newcomers in her company, but if they leave, she is at peace. "Sharing is love," she reasons.

While both had the courage to leave behind their "naughty past", as Ms Ong sees it, conflicts will arise as their personalities are so different. Ms Ong says: "He is a simple guy. I am a multi-tasker. I am a giver and he is frugal. I am positive and he is negative."

This is his first marriage. Ultimately, the couple have an abiding respect for each other and are on

works six to seven days a week. Because they married relatively late in life, they had established their own circles of friends as well.

Neither are they a "kissy-kissy" couple, says Ms Ong, who conveys most of their story as her husband is more private.

Still, Mr Chua lets on that he would have liked to have a child with her. "Can you persuade her?" he even asks this reporter poignantly when his wife is taking a phone call.

Standards of living are not the same. Ms Ong says: "We like being simple, not showy. And we do not live in the past."

an unexpected journey together.

He says: "Counsellors had asked me to think carefully before marrying Jackie as she has kids and we both had little income at the time. They said I will have responsibilities."

"But I had a problematic past and she didn't look down on me. I understand what hope is."

She says: "I am a very strong person, but we give in to each other."

Besides, they both love the simple life after the drama of their past.

Ms Ong says: "We like being simple, not showy. And we do not live in the past."

Two are better than one. You know you are not a superwoman when you are sick.

”

MS JACKIE ONG on her marriage to Mr Daniel Chua. She was a single mum and saw him as a father figure to her two sons and also embraced his companionship

MODERN LOVE

An app-solutely special date

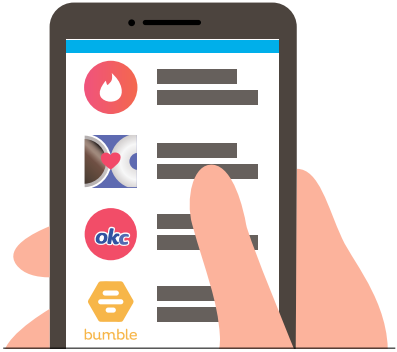
In the complex world of love and dating, the advent of online dating has made things more convenient – but also more confusing. From choosing the right dating app to selecting the best photos for your profile, the modern dating game has come a long way from the traditional boy-meets-girl-on-date. Not to worry, YIP WAI YEE has a step-by-step guide to digital romance, from picking the right app to meeting the right one. Swipe right.



PICK THE APP

• Tinder was the spark which popularised the swiping method – swipe right if you like a profile and swipe left if you are not interested. This may make the matching process a lot more efficient, but it is also why the app, launched in 2012, is often associated with casual hook-ups.

• The dating apps that users say are geared for more serious relationships are Coffee Meets Bagel and OkCupid, as setting up an account with them requires a lot more than just a couple of nice selfies (a la Tinder).



• There are women who make a beeline for Bumble as it gives them more control. After you get a match here, the women are the ones who have to make the first move and start messaging the men.



SET UP THE PROFILE

• No bathroom selfies. According to a survey by dating app Hinge, users who post bathroom selfies are 90 per cent less likely to get likes.

• Wefies are a no-go. How can anyone tell which one in the group you are? Even worse if you are seen with several members of the opposite sex – it just makes you look like a player.

• Look sporty. According to the Hinge survey, women who post sports-related photos are 166 per cent more likely to get likes, while men who do so are 45 per cent more likely to get likes.

• Even if you are using Tinder, which requires only photos to get started, write at least a few lines in your profile to show a bit of personality. But avoid mentioning past relationships.

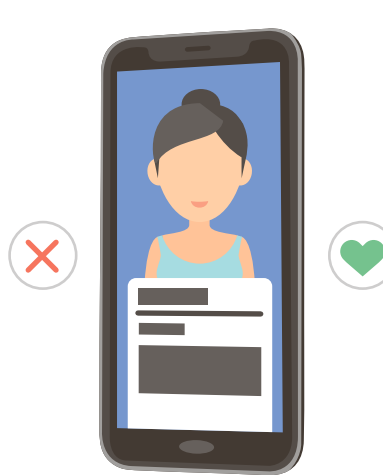
• Check your grammar. A lot of people are turned off by poor English.

• Avoid using the same photos on your profile as the ones on your social-media accounts. It is too easy for someone to search for your social media footprint that way.



MAKE THE CUT

• If you are looking to widen your pool, just keep scrolling until you get matched and then cull the less appealing matches.



• However, if you know exactly what you are looking for, zero in on the ones you are truly interested in.

• Remain active on the app, even when it gets frustrating. Every choice helps to tell the app what you like and, in return, could lead to potentially better matches.



LEARN TO ENGAGE



• Keep it sweet but not too short. For the first text, say more than just a “hi” for a higher chance of getting a response.

• Refer to something your match wrote in his or her profile, or is in his or her picture. It shows that you were paying attention.

• Avoid ghosting. Politely tell your match you are no longer interested, if that is the case, so that he or she is not left waiting around and wondering what happened.

• If a match’s texts make you feel uncomfortable, report him or her to the people in charge of the app. Then delete information about that person immediately.



CONFIRM THE DATE

• Save the date. To avoid disappointment, a seasoned online dater suggests reserving first dates for weeknights rather than weekends. That way, if the date goes badly, you do not feel like you wasted an entire weekend.

• Meet somewhere public and tell a friend where you are going, just to be safe.

• Be yourself. This is cliched, but it is harder to hide behind a mask in person. Your mobile phone screen is no longer shielding you.



Successful ageing



Senior citizens aged 60 and above can get their ears checked at the Project Silver Screen functional screening programme. PHOTOS: MINISTRY OF HEALTH, TED CHEN

Sound advice on hearing loss

Medical expert Dr Barrie Tan Yau Boon shares why it is vital for seniors to have good hearing throughout their golden years

Jac Woo

As people grow older, they may start developing age-related hearing loss. Initially, the hearing loss is very mild and not perceptible. It affects both ears and progresses gradually with age till it finally becomes noticeable to both the person as well as his family and friends.

What are the signs that a senior's hearing ability is declining?

- **Turning up the volume of entertainment devices:** When a senior increases the volume of his television or radio to a very high level, this is an early sign that he is trying to overcome his poorer hearing ability.
- **Not getting the message:** The senior may not seem to hear what has been said. Some seniors may ask the speaker to repeat what was just said or to speak louder. Others may lean closer to the speaker to hear better.
- **Difficulty in hearing voices of women and children:** As age-related hearing loss affects the high frequencies more than the low frequencies, the senior may find listening to women's and children's voices more difficult as they tend to have higher-pitched voices.
- **Poor speech discrimination:** Due to high-frequency hearing loss, the senior may hear something being spoken but is unable to decipher the words. He may feel that other people are mumbling or not speaking clearly.
- **Difficulty in hearing in noisy environments:** The senior may be able to hear when in a quiet room and facing the speaker, but not in a crowded place. He may also have difficulty using the phone.

What are the consequences if a senior's hearing issue is not treated?

- **Communication breakdown:** When a senior cannot hear what is spoken, he may not be aware of the messages conveyed by others. As a result, family members may raise their voices impatiently, which may lead to misunderstanding and tension within the family.
 - **Social isolation and depression:** Difficulties in hearing in crowded environments may lead to the senior avoiding social activities that could otherwise keep him engaged mentally and emotionally.
- The senior may also stop participating in conversations to avoid the problems of

communicating entirely, which could lead to social isolation and depression.

■ **Physical inactivity:** Hearing is not the only sense to deteriorate with age. Often, vision also becomes impaired. Having both eyesight and hearing problems may cause a senior to become socially reclusive and homebound.

This also leads to a vicious cycle of doing less physical activity, which would otherwise have helped to keep him healthy.

Why should seniors get their ears checked?

Many elderly patients tell me that hearing loss is "part and parcel of growing old". They do not realise that social communication is even more vital in the senior years to keep them active and mentally alert. Dementia has now been suggested in many studies to be aggravated by hearing loss.

Keeping our seniors actively engaged in activities and physically independent requires that all their senses are functioning well.

Seniors aged 60 years and above should go for functional screening for hearing, eyesight and oral health yearly.

The hearing checks can help to detect early age-related decline in hearing loss. Follow-up treatment or hearing aids may be recommended for those with hearing issues.

With appropriate education and intervention, seniors can enjoy good hearing throughout their golden years.

Contributed by:
Dr Barrie Tan Yau Boon
Head and senior consultant, Department of Otolaryngology (Ear, Nose & Throat Surgery); director, Centre for Hearing and Ear Implants; and principal investigator, Hearing Research Laboratory; Singapore General Hospital



This series is an initiative under the Action Plan for Successful Ageing.

GET SCREENED EARLY

WHAT:

- Project Silver Screen (PSS) offers functional screening for hearing, eyesight and oral health at subsidised rates to Singapore citizens aged 60 and above.
- It is a partnership between the Ministry of Health, Temasek Foundation Cares and the business community.

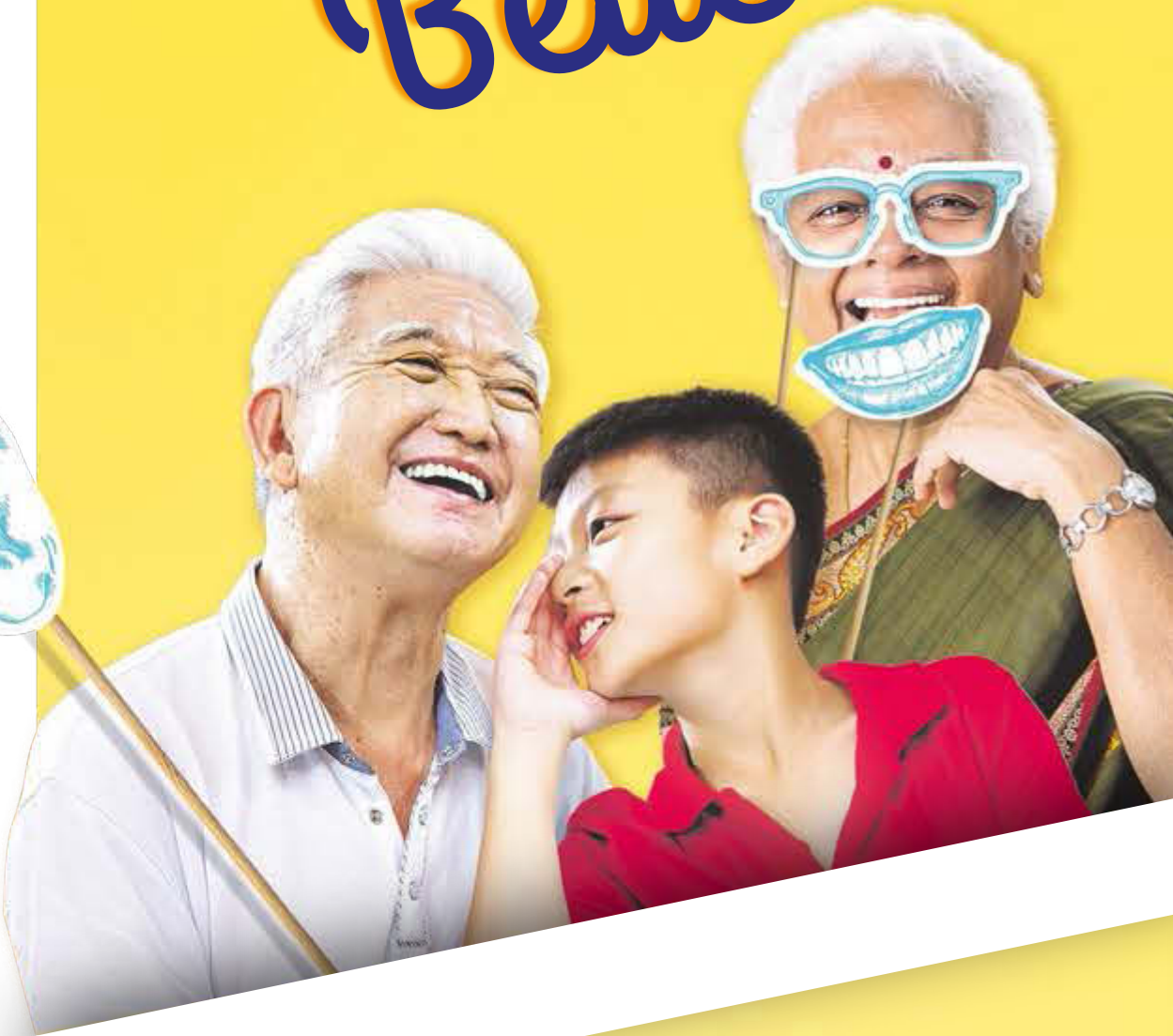
HOW MUCH:

- Free for Pioneer Generation card holders, \$2 for Community Health Assist Scheme card holders, \$5 for all other Singapore citizens.
- If you require follow-up treatment, you will be referred to the relevant healthcare services.
- Need-based subsidies are available for all treatments. You may also receive PSS vouchers of between \$15 and \$200 if you require aids such as spectacles, hearing aids and dentures.

WHERE AND WHEN:

- For more information and functional screening schedules, visit www.projectsilverscreen.sg or call the Singapore Silver Line at 1800-650-6060 (Monday to Friday: 8.30am to 8.30pm, and Saturday: 8.30am to 4pm, excluding public holidays).

Project Silver Screen
See, Hear & Eat Better



Functional screening
for Singaporeans
aged 60
and above

3-In-1

One-stop screening to check
your eyes, ears and mouth

Accessible

Nationwide screening in the community

Affordable

Low fee of \$5 or less for eligible Singaporeans

For more information, call the Singapore Silver Line
at **1800 650 6060**
or visit www.projectsilverscreen.sg

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What Japanese women want

Two Japanese women are opening a matchmaking agency to pair Japanese women with S'pore men



Jan Lee

Ms Hitomi Endo, 49, is looking for love. But in her quest, the divorcee is also helping others do the same.

The Japanese national, who says she is open to dating Singaporean men, is launching Destini IS, a matchmaking agency based here, with 42-year-old Hiromi Kiuchi.

While they welcome men and women of all nationalities and ages, their main goal is to pair Singaporean men with Japanese women.

The agency, which is at WeWork Beach Centre in Beach Road, will officially open only this Friday, and they have received some 200 e-mail inquiries, mostly from local men in their 20s.

Ms Endo, who moved to Singapore for work 14 years ago and is here on an employment pass, says: "In Japan, many men expect their girlfriends or wives to cook, clean and care for them and the home, so much so that some men don't even bother to say thank you when you prepare food for them.

"But from what we and our friends have experienced here, Singaporean men will be grateful when you take care of them. The relationship is more equal."

Ms Endo, whose ex-husband is Japanese and has two children aged 18 and 21, is working in a management post in an English-language education centre.

The agency is a partner of the Japan Marriage Agency Federation, which has a database of 60,000 singles, of which 35,000 are women. Destini IS can tap this database to match its members.

Ms Kiuchi, who is married to a Singaporean man and has a daughter, has lived here for the past 17 years. She says: "It is easier to raise kids here. In Japan, mums bear the responsibility for their children's



Ms Hiromi Kiuchi (far left) and Ms Hitomi Endo believe Singapore men make better husbands than Japanese men as they appreciate it when women take care of them, and the relationship is more equal.

ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

needs. It can be quite stressful."

In a recent New York Times report quoting data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Japanese men spend the least time doing household chores or caring for children than in any of the world's wealthiest nations. Singapore is not a member of the OECD. The report states that fewer than 1 per cent of employed women in Japan are in management positions.

Ms Kiuchi says: "It's easier to have a career here after having kids. In Japan, you can still work but you might get passed over for promotions and other opportunities."

Cooking teacher Miho Sakamoto, 34, is one of the eligible Japanese women whom the duo hope to introduce to Singapore men. She wants to continue working after marriage.

"My ideal man is someone who supports my work and gives me the space and time to focus on my career," says Ms Sakamoto, who lives in Japan and will be here for the launch of the agency. "I've heard from Japanese friends who live here that Singapore men are very kind. I want to meet them and see how things work out."

Destini IS offers three packages. The cheapest is the Like package,

which comes with an enrolment fee of \$288 and a monthly fee of \$158. Prices for this package are on promotion till the end of next month.

There are also a Love package (\$1,888 for enrolment, \$108 for monthly fee) and a Destiny package (\$2,888 for enrolment and \$88 for monthly fee). These packages include vouchers for self-improvement classes and free matchmaking and consultation sessions.

Couples who meet through the agency and tie the knot have to pay the agency \$1,888, which it says is a standard industry practice.

With the growth of dating apps and websites in recent years, how

will Destini IS stand out from the competition? Ms Kiuchi says: "By introducing the signature Japanese hospitality into matchmaking."

Destini IS goes beyond just pairing couples. For instance, if a member is insecure about his looks before the first date, the agency owners will give him advice. And if he encounters problems during courtship or within one year of his marriage, the agency will provide support such as counselling sessions.

Ms Endo adds with a laugh: "Perhaps it's a little bit old school, but maybe that's what people need."

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Songs to romance with and cry to



Eddino Abdul Hadi
Music Correspondent

Love conquers all, when it comes to the lyrical content for pop songs – which is why there is always a song for every occasion.

The Sunday Times compiles playlists of just-the-right songs from the last 50 years for every occasion.

SO HARD TO APOLOGISE

Jealous Guy (John Lennon)

This beautiful 1971 tune is for all the guys out there who have let the green-eyed monster get the better of them and said hurtful things. The late John Lennon wrote the lyrics as an apology – "I'm sorry that I made you cry" – after he became insecure and possessive about his wife, Japanese artist Yoko Ono.



Baby Can I Hold You (Tracy Chapman)

As American singer-songwriter Chapman sings: "Years gone by and still/ Words don't come easily". No matter how long you have been in a relationship, sometimes saying something as simple as "sorry" after making a mistake can be difficult. For a start, how about playing this 1988 tune from the multiple-Grammy winner?



GETTING BACK AT AN INSENSITIVE LOVER

Hurt (Jasmine Sokko)

Taking revenge is wrong, but it can feel oh so sweet, just like this 2018 electro-pop tune by Sokko, a rising name in the home-grown music scene. She sings: "I know I'm kind of selfish/ I just want to hurt you back." She has said: "The person you care about will hurt you because he was trying to be honest. I wanted to do the same to the person who unintentionally hurt me, just so he'd understand. It's a bit petty but it was how I felt at the time."



Sober (Evanturetime featuring Nathan Hartono and The Sam Willows' Benjamin Kheng and Jon Chua)

Sometimes your significant other does not always see you at your best, as this collaboration between producer Evanturetime (inset), popular crooner Hartono and pop band The Sam Willows' Kheng and Chua would attest: "Call me in the morning when you're sober/ When you're ready/ Not in between."



Said Kheng: "Love is inherently a selfish endeavour... We're not painting a glossy picture of a modern relationship; sometimes, you've got to demand pieces of that person and all this talk is very hard to be done when sober."

FOR THOSE READY TO MOVE ON

Thank U, Next (Ariana Grande)

American pop star Grande sings one of the biggest pop hits in recent times – break-ups are hard but you have to make the best of past relationships and, more importantly, take care of yourself and love yourself: "I've learnt from the pain/ I turned out amazing".



Dancing On My Own (Robyn)

A bittersweet club classic by Swedish dance-pop icon Robyn from 2010, this song is another ode to self-love after a break-up. Never mind the ex and as she sings in this modern disco banger: "I'm just gonna dance all night... I'm giving it my all."



WHEN YOU ARE SURE OF LOVE

Grow Old With You (Adam Sandler)

Sandler's brand of crude humour may not be everyone's cup of tea, but as a singer and songwriter, his songs sometimes really hit the spot.

It is from the 1998 romantic comedy classic *The Wedding Singer*, where he plays the titular character and croons this tune for his on-screen lover, played by Drew Barrymore. "Need you, feed you/ Even let you hold the remote control... I wanna grow old with you."

Giving up control over what to watch on TV? Now, that is a sign of true love.



Love Of My Life (Queen)

As the 2018 Freddie Mercury biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody* shows, British rock icon Queen contributed many great songs to the rock canon. And when the group wrote a love song for the ages, they did it with class.

"When I grow older, I will be there at your side/ To remind you how I still love you," Mercury sang in *Love Of My Life*, the 1975 song that guaranteed a mass singalong whenever the band played it at live shows.

SONGS TO GET YOU DANCING

Clarity (Zedd)

This song turned Russian-German producer Zedd into a dance music superstar in 2012, and it is still a staple love tune for couples in clubs and at music festivals. It won a Grammy Award for Best Dance Recording and has been viewed over 237 million times on YouTube.

"If our love is tragedy, why are you my remedy?" asks Foxes, the British singer who sings in this euphoric tune about couples who plunge into relationships despite the odds stacked against them.



You Can't Hurry Love (The Supremes)

This 1966 tune is sung by legendary girl group The Supremes, and written and produced by Brian and Eddie Holland and Lamont Dozier, the iconic Motown songwriting team better known as Holland-Dozier-Holland.

The song has been drawing lovers to the dance floor for over 50 years. It is impossible not to move along to its irresistible drum beat. The Supremes sing the truth: "Love don't come easy/ It's a game of give and take." Love requires lots of patience and is well worth the wait.

Dream celebrity couples

What is better than being an A-list? Being one half of an A-list celebrity couple. Double the star power, glitz and glamour, and double the genes for beautiful babies. It may just be wishful thinking, but here are five pairs of celebrities who should give romance a shot



Jan Lee



JOLIN TSAI AND ASHIN

As one of the top-earning singers in Mandopop who has sold more than 25 million albums in Asia, Taiwanese dance pop queen Tsai, 38, has earned the right to set her sights high.

Ever since she confirmed her break-up in 2016 with model Vivian Dawson after six years together, she has remained single, and who better to fill that gap than Taiwan's biggest rock band Mayday's vocalist and singer-songwriter?

Ashin, 43, is the only single bachelor left in the band and is a match for her in both fame and talent.

A Golden Melody Award-winning lyricist, writer, designer and owner of his own fashion label, he is one of Mandopop's most eligible bachelors.

The two singers have been special guests at each other's concerts numerous times, proof of an enduring friendship.

Tsai, a known baker, made an elaborate fondant cake when Ashin's personal street fashion label Stayreal celebrated its 10th anniversary.

Time to sing a love song together, after all, because Mandopop needs its version of Beyonce and Jay-Z.

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PHOTOS: MAYDAY/
ASHIN/FACEBOOK,
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LEE JOON-GI AND IU

South Korean leading man Lee and popular singer-actress IU shared a tragic romance in the period drama Scarlet Heart (2016) when her character Hae-soo died without reconciling with Lee's Prince Wang So.

But the two have an adorable friendship off the set and regularly show support for each other's projects.

Lee, 36, sent a food truck with churros and coffee to the set of My Mister (2018), which starred IU, 25.

In 2017, she went to his concert, uploading a picture of herself with a

backstage pass in Taiwan.

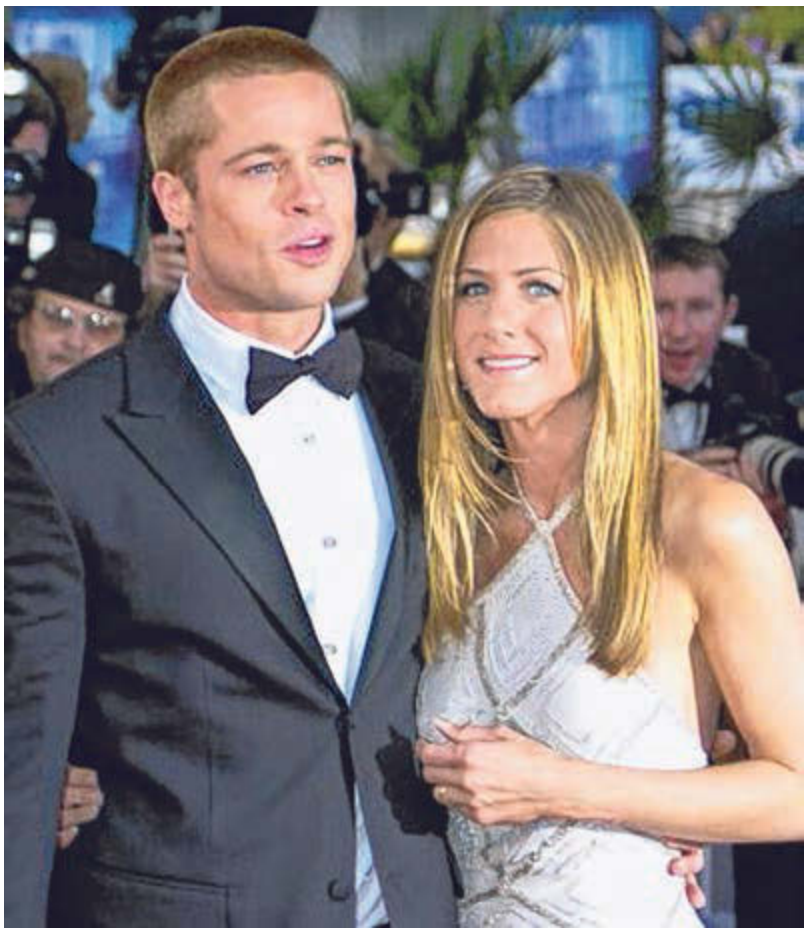
Later that year, he returned the favour and uploaded a picture of them backstage on Instagram.

In October last year, they appeared on variety programme Men On A Mission together as friends.

It is not difficult to imagine a sweet friendship like theirs blossoming into a strong relationship.

The two have an 11-year age gap, but IU has no problem with dating older men.

Her ex-boyfriend of four years, Chang Ki-ha – lead singer of indie K-rock band Kiha & The Faces – is the same age as Lee.



BRAD PITT AND JENNIFER ANISTON

Yes, Pitt cheated on Aniston with Angelina Jolie on the set of Mr And Mrs Smith (2005), ending a five-year marriage with the Friends (1994 to 2004) actress.

But Pitt, 55, is in the midst of a drawn-out divorce with Jolie.

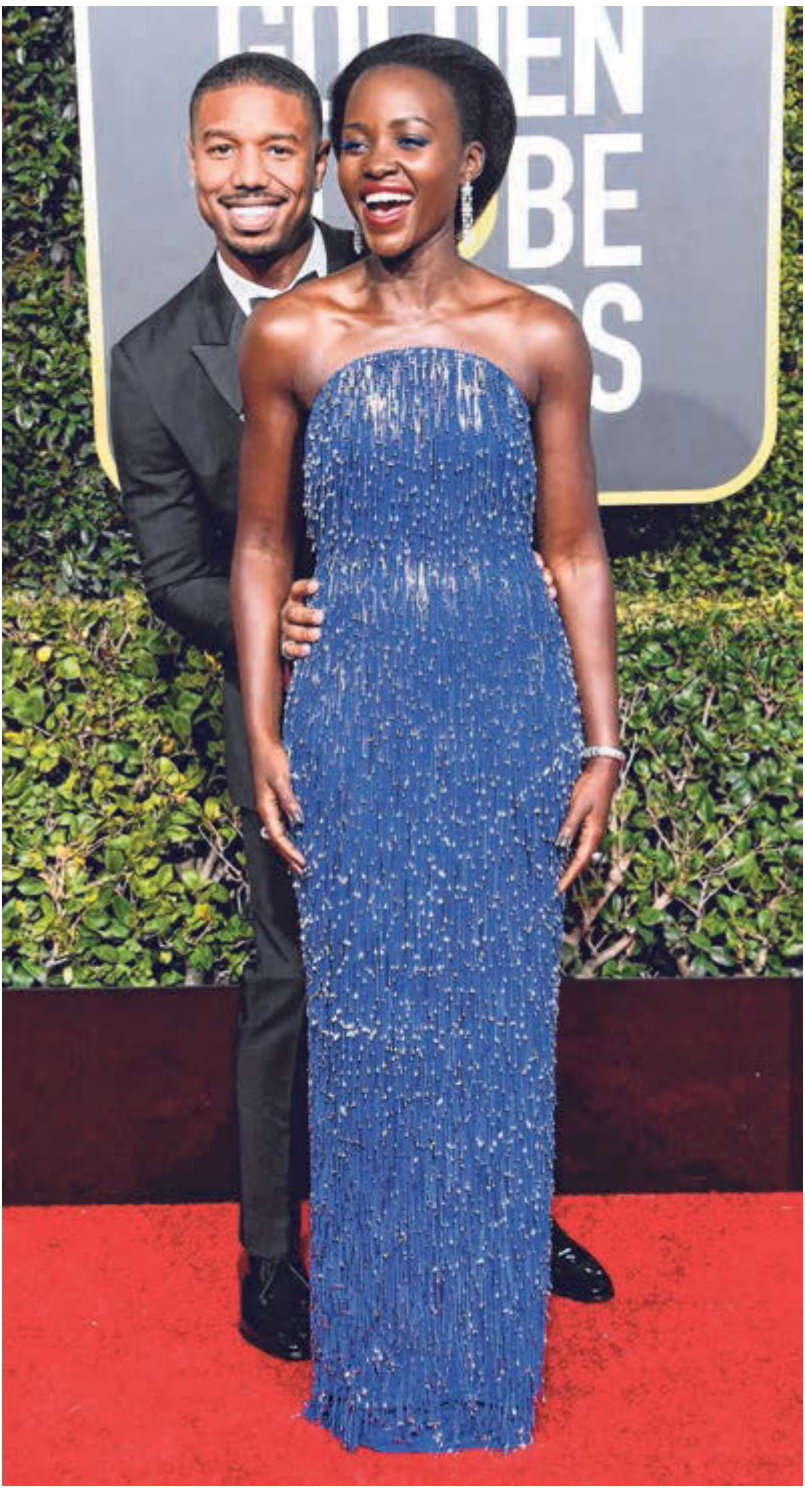
Aniston, 49, separated in 2017 from actor Justin Theroux, whom she married two years before.

Pitt and Aniston have been apart

for close to 15 years. He has since fathered three children with Jolie and adopted three more, while Aniston has remarried and got divorced.

A Pitt-Aniston reconciliation will be a spectacular back-with-the-ex story in Hollywood.

If they get back together, it will be a love story that trumps even the one between Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, Hollywood's It couple who, in the 1970s, divorced and married again after a year, before breaking up again.



LUPITA NYONG'O AND MICHAEL B. JORDAN

Nyong'o, 35, and Jordan, 32, are stars of the blockbuster Marvel hit Black Panther (2018).

Although her on-screen squeeze is Chadwick Boseman's title character, it is Jordan who oozes chemistry with her off-screen.

At the Golden Globes after-party this year, the two of them staged a make-out scene in a lift – with co-star Danai Gurira walking in on them – which was later

posted on Instagram.

They have also exchanged flirtatious tweets with inside jokes, such as a long-running prank that involves Nyong'o commanding Jordan to exercise at any time or place.

It does not hurt that the two are among the best-dressed celebrities hitting the red carpet.

Both Jordan and Nyong'o have repeatedly denied dating rumours, saying that they are just "good friends", but their off-the-charts chemistry and easy rapport is undeniable.



SELENA GOMEZ AND SHAWN MENDES

Former Disney star-turned-pop singer Gomez has been through a lot of drama.

More specifically, seven years of an on-again-off-again relationship with Canadian singer-songwriter Justin Bieber, who married model Hailey Baldwin last year months after a break-up with Gomez.

Gomez, now 26, underwent a kidney transplant two years ago, due

to lupus-related organ damage.

She has had enough drama to last her a lifetime.

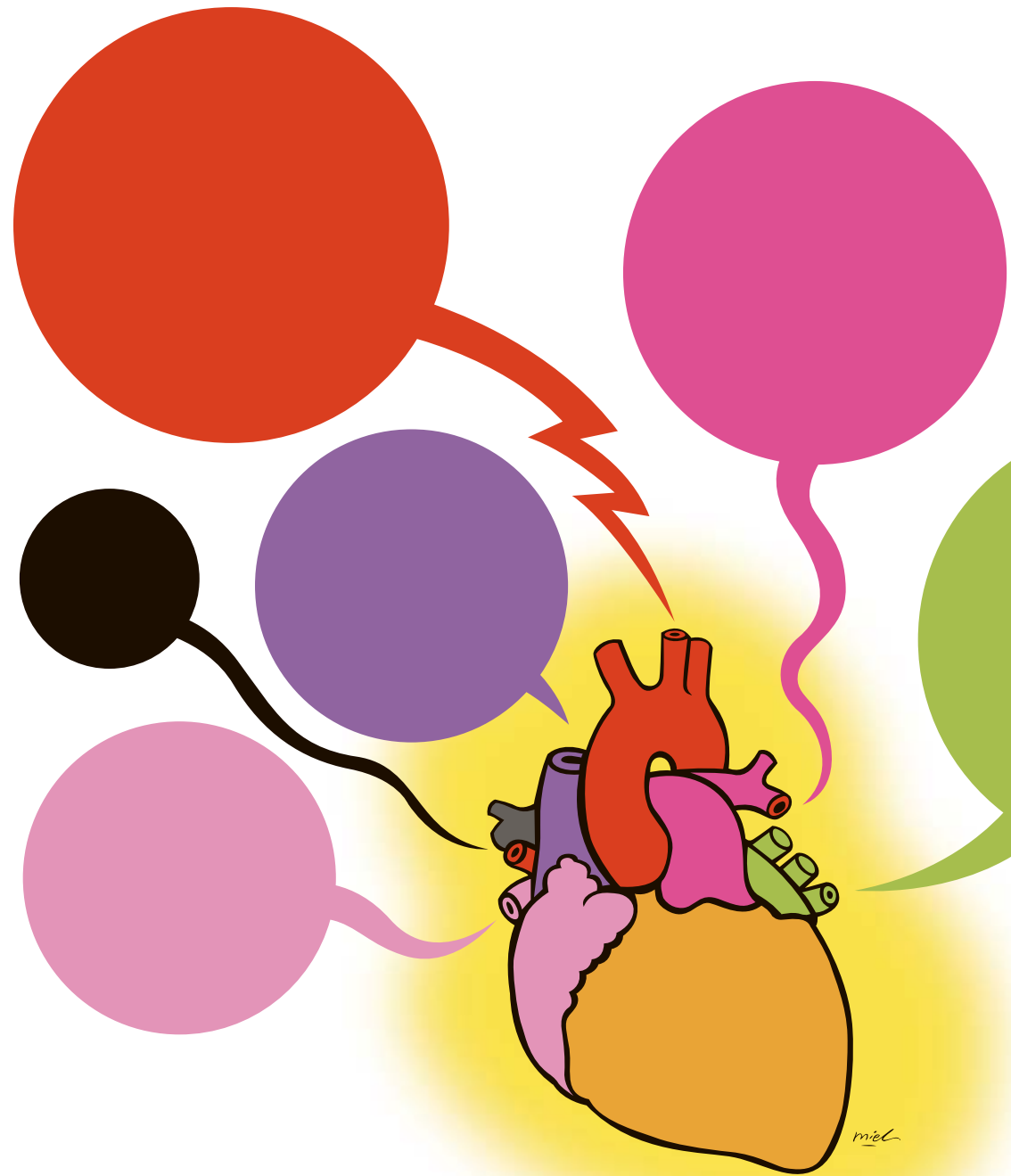
Which is why Mendes – also a Canadian singer-songwriter who is 20 and, importantly, drama-free – seems like a good match for her.

He has a reputation for being a nice guy and has stated in interviews that his ideal date is just "a nice dinner somewhere". His low-key personality might just be the change Gomez needs after a high-profile relationship with Bieber.



MODERN LOVE

LOVE IS...



How do I love thee? It may be hard to count all the ways, but The Sunday Times asked readers to try saying it within 200 words ahead of Valentine's Day. We received more than 150 love stories that ran the gamut of human emotion – from the comic to the tragic, from the supernatural to the mundane, from romantic love to the love between parents and children, and even what it's like to spend Valentine's Day without any love at all. Here are 15 of our favourites, curated and edited by **Olivia Ho**

A "Socks" Tale

As they reached the Korean restaurant, he realised he would need to remove his shoes – and the torn socks he had worn in his hurry to be on time for this date would be a major embarrassment. He was desperate to impress. In their three previous meetings, she had been aloof and a perfunctory handshake had been the closest he had been able to get. They were led to the sunken table to be seated and his walk was awkward as he tried to twist his feet to cover the toes that were sticking out of his socks. She didn't seem to have noticed his discomfort and smiled at him

as they settled in. But then he felt a feminine foot touch his bare toes. A shiver went through him, transmitting itself through his toes to her feet and then to the rest of her. It was as though a circuit had been completed and the current surged through them both. Her smile grew wider and her eyes shone as she looked hungrily at him. Years later, those socks are their prized memory and their ever-hopeful teenage son wears torn socks on all his dates.

• A Sagar, 57, is an entrepreneur in the industrial services sector

Virtually Made

The start was the silent white-on-red notification in her e-mail, a reply she had never expected to get for her comment made on a YouTube video on Mass Effect – the stage of a role play, the role play of a choice chosen out of three others. Her choice was to respond and, despite everything she had been told about men on the Internet, she chose to keep on talking, moving from comment section to e-mail to Facebook messages written like letters. She worried that she was brown. She worried that she was not thin and that she was not his colour. She worried that her PhD was taking far too long and that she was never going to finish. Ever. Also, what was she even thinking doing one?

She worried, above all, that she was far too baggaged, too circumstances-hostaged and too permanent-head-damaged for love. And she went on worrying about all those things and about all new things, even with the ring on her finger and the home they were building together. Each worry, coming and going, never quite taking hold, proved to have far less conviction than the words of two people, virtually made.

• Nuraliah Norasid, 32, is a researcher and the author of the Epigram Books Fiction Prize-winning novel *The Gatekeeper* (2017).

Tropical Love

"A little to the left," said Kumar as he brought the camera up close. A bolt of lightning split the sky outside. The girl tilted her head and smiled. "Neutral expression," he said. "It's a passport photo."

Her eyes lost their crinkle and her lips drooped a bit. Kumar stood staring into the camera for a long time. He studied her pale lips and slightly upturned nose. Her hair fell on her shoulders, the way a stream falls off a faraway mountain. She blinked once and looked into the camera again.

Kumar cleared his throat. His hands fumbled with the camera as the rain made strange patterns upon

the shop window. He trained his eye on the camera again but the girl turned to squint at the sky. He clicked – once, twice, thrice. She turned back and looked at him with her mouth open. The sound of the camera shutter filled the air as Kumar continued to click. Her eyes softened and she laughed. The first signs of sweet love stained her skin. Outside, the Javanese mynah danced as a rainbow arched across the milky sky.

• Susheela Menon, 42, teaches creative writing at a community centre.

Automat

She looked as though she had stepped out of an Edward Hopper painting. With that hat and coat, she should be painting the town red on a Friday, not sitting here with red eyes and a coffee.

His ear ached from making cold calls all day; all he wanted now was a hot dinner. He noticed the tissue in her hand, white as her phone. Between mouthfuls, he would lift his eyes, watching her stare at the screen, careful not to meet her eyes for fear of being caught gawking.

Suddenly, she stiffened. A paroxysm of texting. What happened, he wondered. If this were a movie, the scene might cut to the messages between her and her philandering lover. There would be music. Possibly subtitles. He might even offer...

She got up just as he was done eating. Two women were chatting about collagen injections. One of them shot the waiter a dirty look when he cleared his throat and her plate. The manager was pulling down the roller shutters. Too late: she had already walked away, the tissue tight in her fist.

• Loh Guan Liang, 34, is a poet whose collections include *Transparent Strangers* (2012) and *Bitter Punch* (2016).

The Promise

My father is the best father anyone could imagine. He is the loving husband of my mother, always making her smile.

He has taken me to soccer training since I was six years old. I'm now 11 and he still does it.

One morning, I was searching for a pair of pliers in my father's tool box but found a small, dirty book instead. It was an old diary with his writing in it. I flipped to a random page and noticed the date was exactly one month before my birth. Written there was the following:

"I am 18 years old, an alcoholic, someone who will not be able to

complete school. I used to cut myself and I was sexually abused as a child. I have also been arrested twice for car theft. Next month, I could write: 'I am a father at 18, still a child myself.' But I swear I will do everything right for my little daughter. I will be the father I never had."

I don't know how he did it, but he achieved his goal and really became the best father I could ever imagine.

• Anna Victoria Yates, 13, is a Secondary 2 student at Bedok View Secondary School.

Oi!

It's been a week and still no one has come to see him. His wrists are black and scabby and his ankles are raw with welts. They must itch but he can't reach down to scratch them.

He shouts regularly at all hours with a voice that surprises for his gaunt frame. Expletives and cries of frustration for the pain that racks his bones, that his smattering of Hokkien, Malay and Mandarin cannot explain.

It'll be V-Day on Thursday and my room has a steady stream of fresh flowers, blooming the drab walls into a smile, but every time I wheel down the corridor, he's hunched into himself, eyes tightly shut, like a pine tree bent against

unrelenting wind, curled into a flicker of memory, brittle shelter open to the elements.

I ask my nurse about him. She smiles and says it is dementia, but in a slightly more violent form. The staff call him Mr Oi! because he doesn't press the bell, but shouts to get attention, like the father I never had.

Sometimes, when he starts yelling, she takes a walk. When she's back, the ward is silent, save for the beep and chatter of machines that monitor everything but loneliness.

• Marc Nair, 37, is a poet, photographer and National Arts Council Young Artist Award recipient whose works include poetry collections *Spomenik* (2016) and *Vital Possessions* (2018).

My Love Bloomed Through Reading

My love story started with books.

One Saturday in December 1974, after borrowing two novels from the National Library, I stopped over at the MPH Bookstore.

I took a book and, leaning against a wall, browsed through it. Soon, I became aware of a man standing at the shelf from which I had taken the book. I glanced at him. He was staring at me.

He immediately approached me and said: "Sorry to disturb you, but I want the book you are reading. I came here last week but I did not buy it. And if you do not want it, I shall buy it."

He told me why he wanted the book and I became interested in it. He bought it and suggested having coffee at a cafe at the Capitol Theatre. I agreed.

He then lent me the book *Japan Today*. I, too, love Japan. Two weeks later, we met at this same cafe and I returned the book.

He lent me another book, a novel set in Japan. Thus, a fortnightly "book club" began and along with it, love bloomed between us. A year later, we married.

• Khairon Bibi, 69, is a retired tutor.

Binary

I said to her: "Binary star systems are born when one star gets close to another. Three things can happen." I took our wallets and put one in a distant orbit of the other.

"One is the detached orbit: two stars orbit one another, but do not interact. There is no intimacy, just an orbit out of convenience. Then, there's the semi-detached orbit."

I took her half-empty cup of Milo Dinosaur and placed it near my own half-full one. I moved mine around hers.

"The stars get close. But one star is usually larger and has a stronger gravitational pull. It sucks up material from the other star." I emptied the contents of my cup into hers, which began

overflowing. "Until one becomes a hollow, darkened shell, and the other becomes more massive and closer to implosion and collapse." "Finally, there's the contact orbit." I took her hand in mine. "Two stars dance in orbit, each one feeding the other, growing closer and closer until eventually, they become one star: brighter and stronger than they ever were individually." Our eyes met. Electric. Then she said, "No, I meant who's your favourite star? Like, Lady Gaga or Benedict Cumberbatch?"

• Suffian Hakim, 32, is the author of the parody *Harris Bin Potter And The Stoned Philosopher* (2015) and comic novel *The Minorities* (2017).



Valentine's Day Message

"Come to my house next Thursday for the stone god's birthday!" Valentine's Day. Great.

My Dad was busy with his new wife and my supposed girlfriend was doing tsunami relief in the Sunda Strait, so why not make my crazy old grandmother happy?

After her husband died, Ah Ma worked as a spirit medium, conveying messages from the

dead with the round marble table set in a teak base that we now set the Bu Dong Shi incense on. Then the heavy teak table tilted, then lifted off the floor and started turning.

"Hey, is this table..."

"Why you so angry with Annie?"

A man's voice came out of my grandmother.

"I'm not... who... what..."

"You should be proud. Instead, you get angry, make her sad?" "It's not safe there! Anyway I'm not angry. I'm worried. I love her!"

"Then tell her!" The table grounded itself and something fell off.

"Here..." Ah Ma, speaking in her own voice, held out a tiny, heart shaped stone, "from your grandfather."

"For me?"

"No lah, Goondu... to give your Annie!" "Chinese spirits do Valentine's Day?" "All spirits say the same thing all the time. You people only pay attention some days."

• Ovidia Yu, 57, is a playwright and novelist whose works include the Crown Colony murder mystery trilogy (2017 to present).

Kites

A day does not end young. I let the road take me out of the park.

Then comes the rustle of rain. A first miracle: I am not caught in it.

A second miracle: to meet you, within minutes, on the bus. You are on your way to work.

At our fifth meeting, I describe your intense look watching rain cascade on the window. You laugh – I have not felt that before.

By noon, we are seeing each other a lot. I come to the shop where you work, and we have lunch. You mention a child at our 35th time. I say she must be lovely if she wears your eyes.

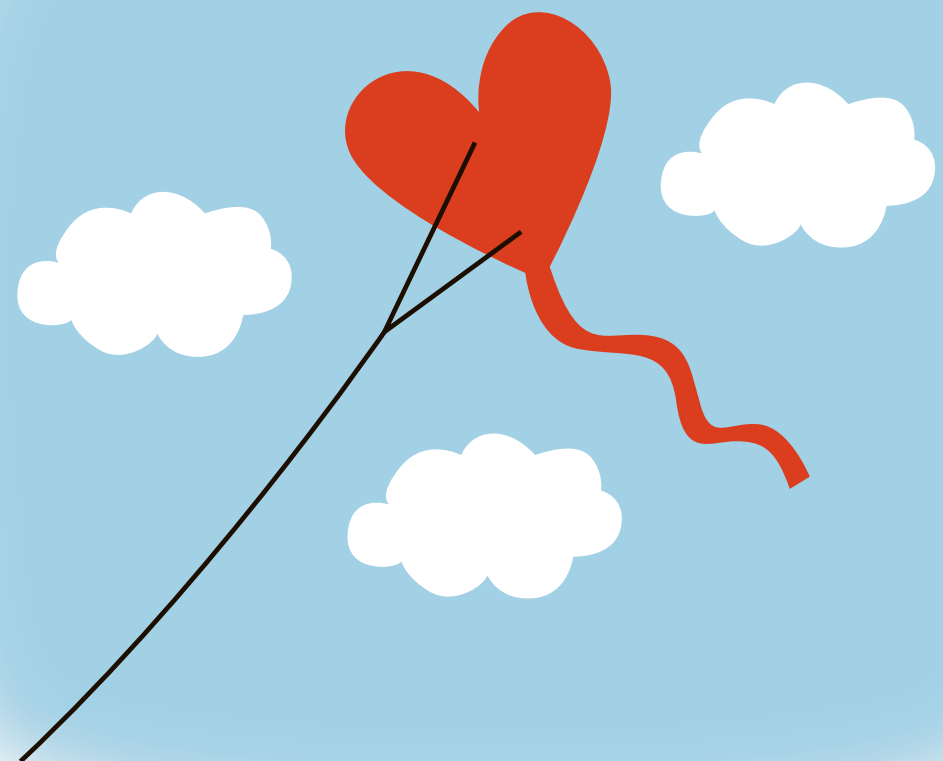
By mid-afternoon, we live together, the three of us. She loves kites, how they spend their lives waiting for the right wind.

The moon peeks in while I hold you. You ask for the 88rd time how we could have met. Do I tell you today?

That morning, I went to the park to die. My heart was broken irreparably. I wanted to see the world, dark as it was, differently. I would that the sunrise knew I could not afford it.

Then I gave myself another chance.

• Gwee Li Sui, 48, is the author of books such as poetry collection *Death Wish* (2017) and humour book *Spiking Singlish* (2017).



Till Death Do Us Part

"I thought that love would last forever. I was wrong."

He turns to the voice behind him. She's slight, wispy like a leaf, no more than 20 years old.

"Such cynicism is unbecoming of one so young," he says wanly. He traces his wife's name on the marble tombstone, just to feel her again:

Jessica Chan: 1985-2015

Loved always

He tries to recall the softness of her skin, her scent after shower and her moonlight smile. But for a moment, the memory is elusive.

"Do you still love her?"

"Why do you think I keep coming back?"

"Habit. Like me."

"Who have you lost?"

"My baby."

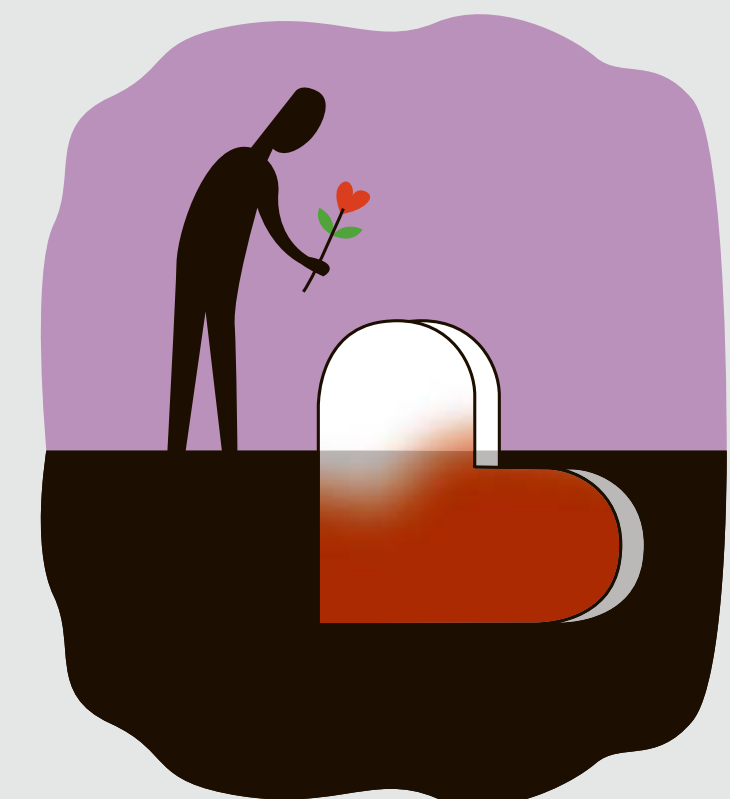
"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. Every love is its own sorrow."

They meet over the next few weeks, spending time they no longer own with their loved ones. Against his will, he finds himself drawn to her world-weariness, the cryptic way she sees love.

"My time's almost up," she says one day. He nods. He can feel his own spirit wanting too.

"So is mine. Marry me before you



go. Till death do us part." She laughs, taking his hand. "Of course. We can't die a second time, can we?"

• Felix Cheong, 53, is the author of 13 books, including five volumes of poetry, a trilogy of flash fiction and a children's picture book.

It's The Little Things

"Isn't it weird to date someone so short? She only comes up to your armpits, which must smell terrible. And don't you look paedophilic next to her?"

Yet does dating someone shorter really change anything? You don't make a conscious adjustment. The body moves itself.

One step lower on the escalator and you're eye to eye, with room for another to pass. Side by side walking, one on the sidewalk and one on the gravel. Or one up on the ledge, hopping parkour-style from bench to berm – the important thing is that you're hand in hand.

In fact, isn't it a nightmare to date someone exactly the same height? Where do all the noses go? It just seems like a banging entanglement of elbows and knees.

The human body's contours are protrusions and hollows, knuckles and notches – the pointy bits weren't designed to line up! Instead, I love how her neck knocks into the crook of my arm, how her crown nestles in the curve between my chin and Adam's apple.

And how do these hypothetical same-heighted people deal with escalators? An awkward standing queue and chance to check your phone? A long escalator is a date. God, I love escalators.

• Joshua Ip, 36, is a Singapore Literature Prize-winning poet and a National Arts Council Young Artist Award recipient whose collections include *Making Love With Scrabble Tiles* (2013) and *Footnotes On Falling* (2018).

In Sickness And In Health

One day, after not hearing from Daddy for a few months, Mommy suddenly received a phone call from The Witch.

Mommy did not even bother to greet her. She just listened silently as the muffled voice went on.

"You can't just return him as if he is some defective goods," she finally answered.

But The Witch did return Daddy. He moved back to the family home eight months after he moved out of it, critically ill with terminal lung cancer.

Daddy's condition was so bad he couldn't get out of bed. Mommy fed him in bed, sponged him and read to him, like what she did for me, as though Daddy was now one of her children.

One night, the entire extended family was summoned to Daddy's bedside. I sat on Daddy's bed, holding his palm which felt dry and cool. I didn't know how long we sat, waiting, as we listened for Daddy's wheeze and gasp after every long, still pause.

Mommy swiped a piece of moist cotton across his lips every half hour. I yawned, laid my head on Daddy's chest and closed my eyes. I could hear his heart beating slowly as I drifted off.

• Wicky Chong, 53, is a recent graduate of Lasalle College Of The Arts with a masters in creative writing.

Dinner For Two

I never knew my father to be a passionate man. His flippant attitude was the underlying reason for my distancing myself from him in my years of growing up. Lips sealed, hands still and eyes always looking out of the window.

Recently, as part of the Aim For Zero campaign with women's rights group Aware, a video about sexual assault made its way to my father's feed, with my face and my voice speaking about a fact unknown to him – a reality unfamiliar.

Bursts of anger and harsh words escaped his lips, his rough hands clenched into fists – directed at the incident but never at me.

"Why did you not say anything when it happened?"

"I did not feel like I could."

Silence followed, but this quiet was not accompanied by distance, nor blame nor shame.

Then we sat at the family table for dinner. The hand-prepared dishes were a mere taste of the depth of his love for this daughter he was seeing for the very first time.

• Dawn Teo, 24, is a writer with a creative studio. She was among the 10 sexual assault survivors featured in the Aware video.

Still Time

What I know to be true: after your liver cancer, parts of you weigh down the present.

(Dusty shoe cabinet, hairs in the drain hole, slippers in disparate directions.)

There is nothing that doesn't bring me back.

Time threatens to rise up and float away.

(Floor mat slightly askew, unread letters for you in the mailbox, dead cockroaches huddled in forgotten corners of the flat.)

The funeral was over a month ago, my friends keep telling me.

(Because you hated cockroaches, I killed them for you, arraying them like a proud cat for your inspection.)

I still don't throw them away, the cockroaches. Maybe ants will carry them away.

(Crestfallen blanket on the floor, rust-red pillows, water stains on the table from a weeping cup of ice.)

Maybe ants will carry me away. They tell me I still have time; there is time for future love.

(Framed pictures of your late parents on the wall. Say hello to them for me.)

"Nobody is too old to meet somebody new," you said.

(A photo on my phone of two of us below a Supertree at Gardens by the Bay, your arm like a bracket over my shoulder.)

There is still time.

• Cyril Wong, 41, is a Singapore Literature Prize-winning writer whose works include poetry collection *The Lover's Inventory* (2015) and novel *The Last Lesson Of Mrs De Souza* (2013).

MODERN LOVE

FUN DATES



Michelle Ng

How do you know if your boyfriend is a sore loser or if your girlfriend will rough it out with you in tough times?

This Valentine's Day, skip the boring ol' dinner and movie date and take your significant other on a date that will reveal a different side of his or her personality you never knew existed. The Sunday Times checks out five quirky dates and gets real-life couples who have been on them to dish on what they discovered about their partners.

ngmich@sph.com.sg



Singapore's first rage room, The Fragment Room, allows couples to smash crates of breakable items. PHOTO: COURTESY OF YEANG CHOWLIN

THE FRAGMENT ROOM

Go if you want to... find out how your partner releases frustrations.

A nondescript, 951 sq ft establishment in Balestier is where some couples go to work out their frustrations – with baseball bats.

In a small concrete-walled room, some people smash everything in sight, while others take longer to put bat to object.

Opened in May 2017, The Fragment Room is Singapore's first rage room where stressed-out folks go to break empty beer and wine bottles, spilt printers and laptops for a cathartic release of emotions.

Undergrad Yeang Chowlin, 23, took her boyfriend of three years, Mr Sim Wei Sheng, 25, to the rage room in December last year.

It was a birthday surprise for Mr Sim, who was a few months into his new job as a financial planner, to help relieve his work stress.

"I'm quite petite and timid so I was scared to break the glasses at the beginning," says Ms Yeang, who stands at 1.57m.

On the other hand, Mr Sim went all out, swiftly breaking both crates of glass bottles in their 30-minute session.

"Actually, I think it's a good place for couples who have issues, but don't dare to tell each other, to work things out," he says.

The couple's top tip is to wear thick-soled shoes and leave any expensive shoes at home.

Price: Starts at \$38 for a 30-minute session for one person, inclusive of one crate of breakable items

Where: 3 Balestier Road
Info: www.thefragmentroom.com



THE FLOATING DONUT COMPANY

Go if you want to... find out how your partner deals with confined spaces

This is the ultimate Marina Bay waterfront dining experience. The Floating Donut Company takes its diners out onto the waters around

the Marina Bay in a small doughnut-shaped boat.

Guests wine and dine on food catered by Italian restaurant Monti.

On the boat, it is sitting room only, with a custom-made round table with grooves to ensure plates and wine glasses stay in place.

One such couple to go on the cruise last month are safety officer

Vincent Wong and Mrs Cassandra Wong, his wife of 16 years, who celebrated his 44th birthday.

The 44-year-old primary school teacher looked it as a surprise for him. The couple have no children.

"It was a novel experience that provided a unique perspective of the city's skyline," says Mr Wong.

A boatman is on board to manoeuvre the boat.

While he is trained to stay out of the conversation, the compact size of the boat means he is within earshot of guests on the boat – which could make for a potentially awkward situation for lovebirds seeking a romantic evening.

The couple decided to engage him in conversation and found him personable, adding that the overall experience was "rather enjoyable".

Launched in late November last year, The Floating Donut Company is on a six-month trial.

The project stalled for three years after it hit roadblocks with local regulatory agencies. It currently operates three boats at Clifford Pier.

Each boat, which can hold up to

nine people, comes fitted with a UV-protected sun shade and fans.

Price: \$299 for a 90-minute romantic cruise for two, inclusive of a cold cut platter and a bottle of sparkling wine.

Where: Clifford Pier, 80 Collyer Quay
Info: www.flodoco.com

Safety officer Vincent Wong and his wife celebrated his birthday on a doughnut-like boat from The Floating Donut Company. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG



AXE FACTOR

Go if you want to... find out if your partner is able to handle their axes (or exes) well.

At Singapore's first axe-throwing range in Bukit Timah, participants throw – either single or double-handedly – an axe that weighs about 800g at a wooden board 426cm away. The set-up follows the safety regulation set by the National Axe Throwing Federation.

Those up for friendly competition can rack up points based on where the axe lands, similar to how darts work.

Human resource officer Jasmine Ee, 28, and RSF regular Jim Tan (both above), 30, took on the axe-throwing challenge and agreed that the loser had to buy the winner a meal. The couple, who have been dating for three years, were there to celebrate Ms Ee's birthday last month.

The staff at Axe Factor told Ms Ee that women are often better than men at handling the axes, as men tend to rely on brute strength rather than technique. This turned out to be true in her case.

"Surprisingly, I got the hang of it faster than he did, which was quite funny, and he started being really competitive," says Ms Ee, who eventually lost after playing three games.

There are a total of 12 lanes, with a private room to cater to larger group bookings of up to 25 people.

Opened in August last year, Axe Factor also provides a red axe for birthday guests to cut their cake with.

"At the end of it, my arms were super sore. It felt like a workout, but I don't mind doing it again as I've now gotten the hang of it," says Ms Ee.

Price: Starts at \$28 for a one-hour session for one person

Where: 01-32A The Grandstand, 200 Turf Club Road

Info: www.axefactor.com.sg



Camp in style at East Coast Park with the glam tents provided by Glamping Society. PHOTOS: KEVIN LIM, COURTESY OF JASMINE EE, COURTESY OF JAZMYNE GWEE

GLAMPING SOCIETY

Go if you want to... find out if your partner can tough it out.

Ditch the hotel and opt for a different type of staycation at East Coast Park with Glamping Society.

Lest you think you will be tossing and turning all night on a ground sheet in a shoddily-pitched tent, the camping experience is as fuss-free and comfortable as it comes.

The spacious glamping tents set up by Glamping Society come in three sizes – medium, large and jumbo – and can accommodate between two and eight people.

To ensure a romantic getaway, the tents are decked out in Insta-

gram-worthy decor including fairy lights, cushions and stylish floor mats.

But it is still the great outdoors so expect a few sandy bites.

That was what happened to Mr Ivan Chong, 44, an accounting firm director, when he went glamping with his girlfriend Tina Tan, 35, who works in a bank.

The couple, who have been together for 10 years, stayed in one of Glamping Society's 12 tents at East Coast Park on Dec 31 to count down the new year.

"Of all the times we've gone camping, this is the first time we got bitten," says Ms Tan.

"We just laughed it off." The couple have gone on at least



HOLEY MOLEY GOLF CLUB

Go if you want to... find out if your partner plays by the rules.

It is always par-tee time at mini golf club and bar Holey Moley Golf Club, which features 27 holes split across two floors in a 17,000 sq ft space.

Each hole is inspired by pop culture themes from television shows and classic films such as The Simpsons to nostalgic games such as Pac-Man.

The venue has tons of photo opportunities, including an "Iron Throne" made out of golf clubs inspired by HBO television series Game of Thrones.

Each participant gets a maximum of six shots for each hole.

Marketing executive Jazmyne Gwee, 26, was pleasantly surprised when her boyfriend Jonathan Goh (both above), 30, who is self-employed, stuck to his six tries.

"He played fair according to the rules so I was really impressed," says Ms Gwee. "On the other hand, I tried so many times to score the shots."

The couple were there in December last year to celebrate their fifth anniversary.

There is a full-service cocktail bar called The Caddyshack and a kitchen that serves up burgers, hot dogs and fries.

The outlet in Clarke Quay, which opened in December last year, can host up to 450 guests.

Price: Starts at \$12 for a couple package, inclusive of a medium tent and picnic set-up with one large pizza and sparkling juice.

Where: East Coast Park Carpark G
Info: www.holeymoley.com.sg



The Monarchy bar celebrates everything British. PHOTOS: THE MONARCHY, IB HQ SINGAPORE, JUNIOR THE POCKET BAR, THE EXCISEMAN WHISKY BAR, WANDERLOST LOUNGE/FACEBOOK

There's a bar for everyone



Anjali Raguraman

If you are looking to impress your date over drinks this Valentine's Day, look beyond the finery of Atlas or Manhattan for these new bars that have opened over the last six months.

For a whiff of adventure, seek out tiki cocktails at 10-seater Pacifica by Junior The Pocket Bar, hidden in the back alleys of Tanjong Pagar, or sample mocktails at Wanderlost Lounge on a rooftop in the same neighbourhood.

For quiet conversation, there is IB HQ, located in a second-floor shop house in Kampong Glam, while one of Singapore's newest whisky bars, The ExciseMan, is perfect for the whisky lover.

For the music nerd, check out The Monarchy in Tras Street, with its cocktails named after British rock and pop classics, and stay on for the after party in the same space.

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Pacifica By Junior The Pocket Bar

Go if you like... strong, tiki-style cocktails

Hidden in a back alley of Tanjong Pagar road, tiki cocktail-themed Pacifica is the third iteration of Junior The Pocket Bar, which rotates its bar programme every six months.

Expect plenty of heady tiki classics such as the Zombie (\$25), which is made with a potent mix of three rums. The bar also subscribes to the ethos that "tiki should always be over the top" and fittingly, boozy drinks such as Return Of The Jangshi (\$25), is made with mushroom-infused rye whiskey, beetroot and smoky mezcal.

If you are feeling peckish, there is also a small menu of bar snacks. This cosy 10-seater bar fills up quickly.

Where: 43 Tanjong Pagar Road (entrance in the alley in Cook Street)
Open: 6pm to midnight. Closed on Sundays
Info: facebook.com/JuniorThePocketBar

The ExciseMan Whisky Bar

Go if you like... independent whisky bottlings from Scotland

One of Singapore's newest whisky bars, it is hidden on the second floor of the Esplanade Mall.

Here, the shelves are mostly lined with independent bottlings, including those by Douglas Laing – a family-owned company considered as one of the foremost independent bottlers in Scotland.

Among the range stocked here is Douglas Laing's Remarkable Regional Malts series, each bottling of

The Monarchy

Go if you... like Britpop classics

The first sign of The Monarchy, housed across two sprawling shophouses in Tanjong Pagar, is a recreation of the iconic 10 Downing Street door at the entrance.

From the pop art paintings of British icons such as Princess Diana and George Michael that line the walls, to the staff dressed like they came fresh off the set of BBC period drama Peaky Blinders, the space captures the era of Cool Britannia.

Its 18-cocktail menu is also perfect for the date who is the music nerd, with drinks named after classic British tunes and a playlist of the same. Cocktails start at \$21++.

The Rolling Stones hit Paint It Black for instance, is inspiration for the cocktail of the same name (\$22++). This black whisky sour made with scotch whisky and citric

acid gets its colour from activated charcoal.

If the date goes well, there is also the option of an after-party in the adjoining Ultra Lounge, which is open only from 10pm on weekends and the eve of public holidays.

Run by founder of Formula 1 after party The Podium Lounge, Robbie Hoyes-Cock, and former executive director of Pangaea, Steve Yallop, the nightclub section of The Monarchy boasts seven VIP tables and bottle service.

The music programme is centred on house tunes and will have a rotating roster of local, regional and international DJs.

Where: 56 Tras Street
Open: 6pm to 3am (Tuesdays to Fridays), 6pm to 4am (Saturdays and eve of public holidays). Closed on Sundays
Info: www.monarchy.sg, facebook.com/TheMonarchy

IB HQ Singapore

Go if you like... Valentine's Day themed cocktails with housemade distillates

Tucked away on the second floor of a shophouse in Kampong Glam, IB HQ, short for Indigenous Bartender Headquarters, is the upscale version of a cosy home bar.

Here, you are welcomed by husband-and-wife team, Kamil Foltan, who was group beverage manager for the Potato Head Group and head bartender of Tipping Club, and photographer Zurina Bryant.

Their platform, Indigenous Bartender, was developed to explore locally-sourced ingredients with like-minded individuals.

From its regular menu, try the banana whisky-based Musa (\$24++) or the Osmanthus gimlet (\$24++), made with gin and an osmanthus cordial.

Wanderlost Lounge

Go if you like... storybook-themed mocktails

Finding this hidden rooftop bar Wanderlost Lounge involves crossing a field, going up a slope, taking a lift, then climbing a flight of stairs.

At this bar that serves book-themed, non-alcoholic cocktails, drinks are by The Halal Mixologist, best known for the now-closed Atap Bar in Bugis, which also served creative mocktails.

For instance, The Alchemist (\$15), named after the Paulo Coelho book, is made with kombucha, tea distillate and sour plum nectar. Served in a conical flask, the concoction arrives with wisps of smoke.

With a floral and fruity taste profile, The Little Prince (\$15), named after the Antoine de Saint-Exupéry book, is made with rose water, lavender distillate and pineapple juice.

Also expect cocktails inspired by



For Valentine's Day, it has a special menu with drinks such as Amore (\$24++), made with Rose Tequila, lychee and champagne and Ops, I Forgot, made with rum, honey, earl grey and rose.

There will also be a complimentary selection of chocolate and fruit throughout the night.

Where: 774A North Bridge Road
Open: 5pm to midnight (Tuesdays to Saturdays). Closed on Sundays and Mondays
Info: ibhqsingapore.com



Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone, Stardust, Charlie And The Chocolate Factory, ranging in price from \$13 to \$15.

If you are feeling peckish, there are tapas and snacks such as chicken karage (\$9) and grilled tacos (\$10).

Where: 12-01 Realty Centre, 15 Enggor Road
Open: 5.30pm till late (Mondays to Saturdays). Closed on Sundays
Info: www.wanderlostlounge.com



beer and cocktails.

Where: 02-27 Esplanade Mall, 8 Raffles Avenue
Open: 3.30 to 11.30pm (Mondays to Saturdays). Closed on Sundays
Info: theexciseman.com



Let's face the truth in a break-up

A divorce tends to be ugly but there is no need to hide behind useless jargon and meandering prose



Abel Ang

“After a long period of loving exploration and trial separation, we have decided to divorce and continue our shared lives as friends.” This was posted on Twitter last month by Jeff and MacKenzie Bezos – formerly the richest couple in the world. People seem to have a natural tendency for useless jargon and to complicate ideas. For a couple that together built the most valuable company in the world – e-commerce behemoth Amazon – I found the post unreadable and an overly convoluted way to announce their divorce.

What does a “loving exploration” during a trial separation even mean? I don’t want to live with you, but I am going to do it in the most loving way I know how? During the trial separation, did they send texts to each other punctuated with little emoji hearts to make it more loving?

The words just don’t belong together in the same sentence. Just like blow torch and ice cream do not belong together, one object neutralises the other, leaving a sticky charred mess. This incongruity repeats itself in the 17 lines of the announcement.

“If we had known we would separate after 25 years, we would do it all again. We’ve had such a great life together as a married couple...” If life was so great as a married couple, why the divorce? They wanted to end it on a high note? Like a successful doubles tennis team retiring after winning the last Grand Slam of their career?

“We also see wonderful futures ahead, as parents, friends, partners in ventures and projects, and as individuals pursuing ventures and adventures.” This part of the announcement is the piece de resistance in convolution.

They both own 16 per cent of Amazon – worth US\$132 billion (\$\$179 billion) – so they will have to play nice with each other, that is understandable. But what are we to make of the statement?

They will be partners for “ventures and projects” but individuals pursuing “ventures and adventures”? Should we be looking out for some potentially risky lifestyle behaviour as they forge

ahead as newly minted individuals? Perhaps the salacious revelations from Mr Bezos on Thursday, accusing the National Enquirer publisher of extortion over intimate photos is a taste of the “adventures” to come.

I understand, after the long marriage, emotions probably got the better of them and they could barely read or think straight, resulting in this unreadable and emotional post. The post stands in sharp contrast with Mr Bezos’ 1997 shareholder letter to Amazon shareholders, what he terms his Day 1 letter.

The cogency, clarity and long-term vision is truly exemplary in that document. Especially in the way that it sets out how Amazon would eventually rise from a start-up to becoming the most valuable company in the world. It is no wonder that he still sends that letter to his staff today to remind them to keep faith with the Day 1 vision and to guard against being insipid, slow moving and irrelevant.

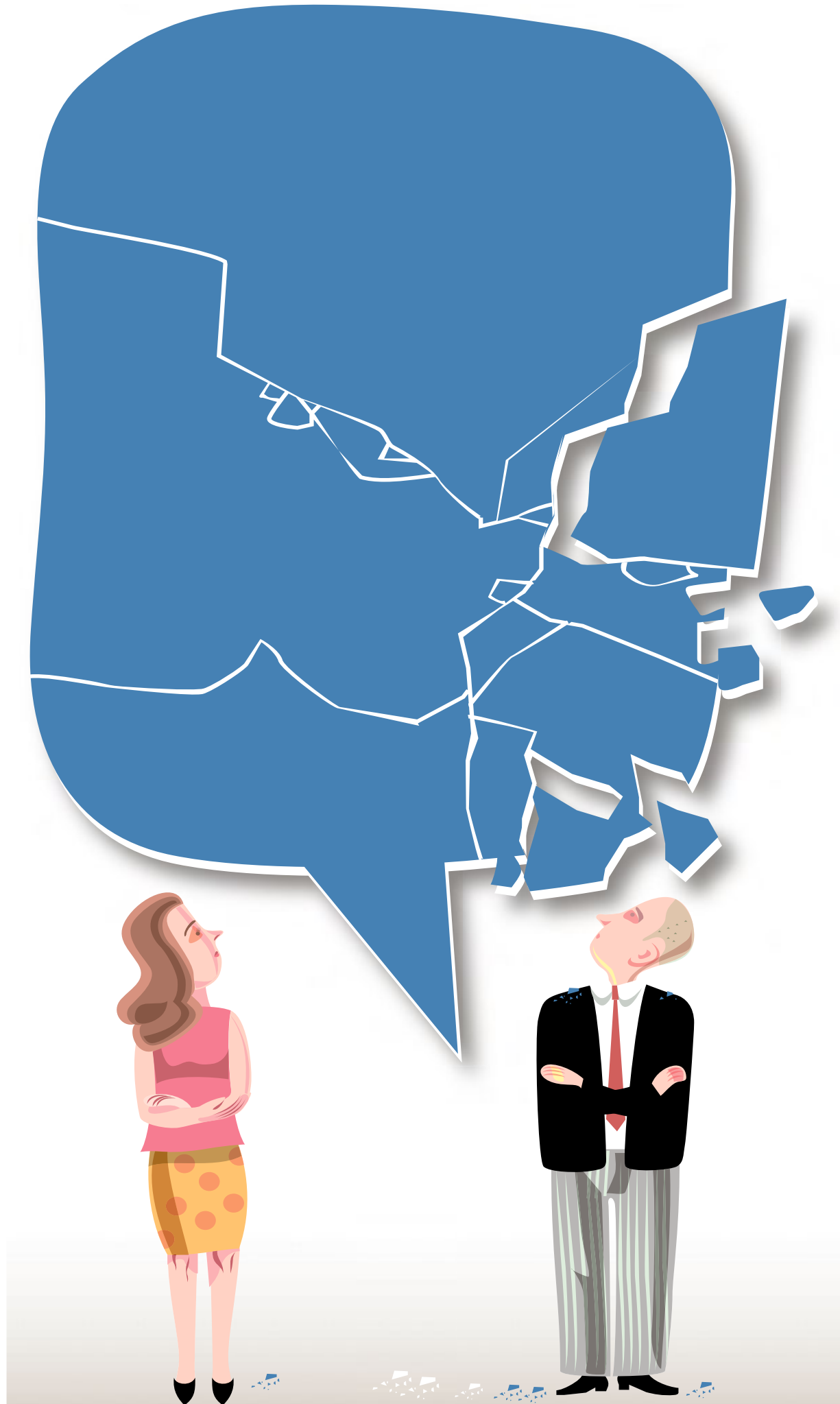
A professional situation which seems to evoke similar patterns to what we observe in the Bezos’ divorce post is resignation letters, especially those of public figures.

When Mr Boris Johnson resigned as foreign minister of Britain, he said that the Brexit “dream is dying, suffocated by needless self-doubt”.

He went on to say: “The government now has a song to sing. The trouble is that I have practised the words over the weekend and find that they stick in the throat.”

It is an epic resignation letter worthy of the Bezos’ divorce post except that Mr Johnson was “divorcing” Mrs Theresa May professionally after only two years, as opposed to the Bezos’ 25-year journey. One wonders what would happen if Mrs May and Mr Johnson had worked together for longer.

Another resignation letter that comes to mind is from Mr John Mattis, the former United States secretary of defence’s resignation letter to President Donald Trump, where he resigns “because you have a right to have a secretary of defence whose views are better aligned with yours on these and other subjects”.



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

It sounds like the “irreconcilable differences” reason in a divorce announcement. It also smacks of the classic break-up excuse: “The problem lies with me and not you, let us stay as friends.”

In all seriousness, divorce is not a pretty topic. Especially when kids are involved and are deeply hurt and affected by the change in their parents’ marital situation, which is why I was so impressed when I read actress Jacelyn Tay’s Instagram post announcing her divorce late last year.

She ripped the Band-Aid off in the very first line of her post declaring: “I am at the final stage of divorce proceedings.”

Tay delivered this life-changing moment for her and her son in a direct, clear and authentic way. No meandering prose about loving exploration or the great life she and her soon-to-be ex-husband had in their seven years of marriage. She went on to acknowledge that “many may be shocked” and assured the public that “me and Xavier are fine”.

She spoke truth when she said that she did not “owe anyone the reason for the divorce except to my son”. Yet, she found it in her heart to show decency towards her ex-spouse: “Zavier is on a flight with his daddy to explore Europe.” There is much to admire about

what Jeff and MacKenzie Bezos have done to build the most valuable and ubiquitous company in the world. But on the front of divorce announcements, I would suggest that they have something to learn from tiny Singapore – in particular, Jacelyn Tay.

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• Abel Ang is a medical device company CEO, Adjunct Associate Professor of Business and a board member at several high-technology companies. He has been married for 20 years. The views expressed in his monthly column, which starts this week, are strictly his own.

Romantic movies are but beautiful lies



John Lui

Romantic films are meant to be watched and forgotten. Do not attempt to try anything they do.

That is the most important lesson: Learning about love from romantic movies is like learning road safety from The Fast And The Furious movies. It took me a long time to work that out.

The English Patient (1996), a film about old-fashioned planes and Italian monasteries, is based on the Bad Boy idea. Lots of romantic films are.

The thing to remember is that the bad boy in The English Patient is a Hungarian count who does a lot of sexy brooding, in a Ralph Fiennes flavour.

Sexy brooding is extremely hard for normal people. Most times, people who catch you doing it will ask if you need to take sick leave or tell you to put out your cigarette when all you want is for your face to be framed by the wisps of smoke curling around your chiselled jaw, silhouetted by the golden Cairo sun.

And unlike the woman played by Kristin Scott Thomas, who is intrigued by glum, antagonistic men, if you or I acted that way, most normal women will assume the behaviour is compensating for a small male organ and stay away.

In The Notebook (2004), you have a bad boy, played by Ryan Gosling, who lures a woman away from her marriage for a night of passion.

The thing to remember about romantic movies is that in them, women are lured away from their vows by weird, moody guys each time they go to the supermarket or make a bank deposit.

That is normal in the movies, but not in real life. Because many women already have a weird,



moody guy in their lives, called a husband.

One example of a woman who embraces the chaos is in Titanic (1997).

It follows the principle that love is bold, dramatic and talky. This is impractical because in the time Jack had taken to talk to Rose, he could have paddled around looking for another raft and changed the ending of the movie entirely.

In Fifty Shades Of Grey (2015),

Men misunderstand that women are drawn to moody men like Fifty Shades Of Grey’s Christian Grey. PHOTO: UIP

Jamie Dornan’s Christian Grey is a moody guy. Men misunderstand the movie, perhaps deliberately, by saying it shows that women want a moody, emotionally unavailable guy. This ignores the fact that Grey is a billionaire and incredibly sexy. Moody sexy billionaires are a challenge for ambitious women. Moody mid-level executives in sales and software development are not.

People – and by that, I mean men – who dismiss Fifty Shades as drivel

forget that it is a fantasy. Grey is about as real as Boba Fett.

Trying to emulate Grey in an attempt to be more attractive would be ill-advised cosplay.

Like all cosplay, it will impress the nerds, but it doesn’t mean that any of them will want to sleep with you, or you with them.

In Four Weddings And A Funeral (1994), Hugh Grant gave hope to awkward guys.

These are men who could not hope to be one of the other romantic heroes, such as the sullen aristocrat of The English Patient or the action man that Daniel Day-Lewis played in The Last Of The Mohicans (1992).

Grant inspired men with the idea that if they let their hair grow long in front and stumbled around amusingly, they might have a chance.

“Movie awkward” is not the same as “real-life awkward”. It takes a lot of expensive schooling and good taste to look that artfully dishevelled or that charmingly inept. Again, if you or I tried it, we would end up looking just

one rung up on the socio-economic ladder from homeless.

Romantic films ruin real places for people. In The Mood For Love (2000) by Hong Kong director Wong Kar Wai makes Hong Kong look like magic.

There is not much of a story here because it is all about atmosphere: the street lights, the cigarettes, Maggie Cheung’s stiff, shiny qipao and Tony Leung’s stiff, shiny hair.

The real Hong Kong is liable to be disappointing. Just as everyone who went to Paris after watching Amelie (2001) found – to their horror – rudeness, pickpocketing and dog owners who let their pets give its streets the pervasive smell of wee.

Psychologists call it the Paris Syndrome. It is the shock to the senses that happens when one realises that everything that one believed about the city is a lie.

That is how it is with romantic movies. They are seductive fantasies and it is best to treat them as such.

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chewonitcomics.blogspot.com

claw on SPEEDINESS

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chewonit Feb 10, 2019

BABY BLUES™

BY RICK KIRKMAN & JERRY SCOTT

OKAY, GUYS, LET'S GO IN FOR SOME HOT COCOA!

YEAH!

WOO HOO!

WAIT...

...WHY ARE YOUR OLD SKI GLOVES DUCT-TAPED TO THEIR FEET??

EVERYBODY OUTGREW THEIR BOOTS.

LOOK! CHICKEN FEET!

PEANUTS

featuring "Good ol' Charlie Brown" by SCHULZ

2-10

SOME FRIENDSHIPS ARE DOOMED FROM THE VERY BEGINNING!

SHERMAN'S LAGOON

HEY.

HEY.

SOMETHING'S DIFFERENT.

MMPH.

YOU LOST AN ENTIRE ROW OF TEETH, DIDN'T YOU?

YES, I DID. NOW, NOW WHAT?

NOW YOU JUST HAVE TO SIT THERE AND WAIT FOR THE NEW ONES TO GROW IN, DON'T YOU?

SO VULNERABLE, SO EXPOSED. THE KIND OF SITUATION A LESSER FRIEND MIGHT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF.

WAIT, THAT'S ME.

TWENTY BUCKS OR I TELL THE DOLPHINS.

I'VE STILL GOT PEPPER SPRAY.

BY JIM TOOMEY

garfield.com

GARFIELD

LIZ...

LIZ, L.L.L.L.

YOU SEE, I UHHHHHHHHH... UMMMMMM...ERRRR...

WELL, IT'S JUST THAT I... UHHHHH... YOU KNOW, UMMMM...

I LOVE YOU TOO, JON

AND I BET YOU THOUGHT I COULDN'T SAY IT!

BREWSTER ROCKIT: SPACE GUY!

I NEVER NOTICED IT BEFORE EITHER, BUT I SAY IT'S WORTH A SHOT!

RESET

R.U. SIRIUS

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BY TIM RICKARD

Sudoku Pacific

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

		6	3					
						9	3	
1	3	5		6	9			
6				5		1		8
				8				
8		1		7				4
			4	9		5	8	7
	9	7						
					6	2		

2/10

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Previous Puzzle Answer

5	6	2	7	4	8	3	1	9
4	3	7	6	9	1	2	5	8
9	1	8	2	3	5	4	7	6
1	9	5	3	6	4	7	8	2
7	2	3	1	8	9	6	4	5
6	8	4	5	2	7	9	3	1
3	4	9	8	5	6	1	2	7
2	5	1	9	7	3	8	6	4
8	7	6	4	1	2	5	9	3

Free to air

CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (HD) (PG) (Variety)
7.00 The Dr Oz Show 8 (HD) (Info-Ed)
7.45 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (Variety)
8.00 Talking Point 2018 (Current Affairs)
8.30 Wheel Of Fortune 35 (HD) (Variety)
9.30 Secret Meat Business (Info-Ed)
10.00 Andre Rieu: Welcome To My World (Culture)
11.00 Young Euro Classic 2017 Highlights (Culture)
PM
12.00 Meat And Greed 2 (HD) (Variety)
12.30 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (HD) (Info-Ed)
1.00 America's Got Talent 12 (HD) (PG) (Variety)
3.00 World's Best Beaches (Variety)
4.00 Buzzing Hawkers (Variety)
5.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (PG) (Variety)
5.30 Films & Stars (PG) (Variety)
6.00 Tricked (Canada) (PG) (Variety)
6.30 The Simpsons 29 (HD) (PG) (Sitcom)
7.00 Cine on 5: Kung Fu Panda 3 (Movie)
9.00 News 5 (HD)
9.30 Wild City (CC) (Info-Ed)
10.30 Troy (PG13) (M)
AM
1.30 Plastic Surgery Is My Business (HD) (PG) (Info-Ed)
2.00 Andre Rieu: Welcome To My World (Culture)
2.50 Young Euro Classic 2017 Highlights (Culture)
3.50 Tricked (Canada) (PG) (Variety)
4.20 Wheel Of Fortune 35 (HD) (Variety)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 8 (HD) (Info-Ed)
5.50 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (Variety)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 Food Source 3 (HD) (Variety)
7.00 Portrait Of Home 2 (Drama)
9.00 Happy Friends (Schoolkids)
9.30 New Doraemon (Schoolkids)
10.00 Little Incredible Explorer (Children)
10.30 Mark Your Calendar (Children)
11.00 Comfort Food Recipes 2 (Chinese New Year Specials) (Info-Ed)
11.30 One Hundred Tastes Of Taiwan 2 (HD) (Info-Ed)

PM
12.00 Justice In The City (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.00 City Foragers (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.30 Say It! (Variety)
3.30 Home Dining (CC) (Variety)
4.30 Beyond Words (PG) (CC) (Drama)
6.30 Singapore Today (HD) (News)
7.00 Spring Flower (PG) (CC) (Drama)
10.00 News Tonight (HD) (News)
10.30 Discover 30 Degrees North Latitude (PG) (CC) (Variety)
11.30 New Year, Old Taste (CC) (Info-Ed)
AM
12.00 The Legend Of S (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.00 Unriddle 2 (PG) (Drama)
4.00 The Deer And The Cauldron (HD) (PG) (Drama)

CHANNEL U

AM
8.00 Home Shopping (Infomercial)
10.00 Perfect Match 3 (Variety)
PM
12.00 Rites Of Motherhood (CC) (Info-Ed)
12.30 Food Quest 2 (Info-Ed)
1.30 The Stories Between Us (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.00 Food Notes 2 (CC) (Info-Ed)
3.00 Golden Rainbow (PG) (CC) (Drama)
5.00 Mrs Cop (PG) (CC) (Drama)
7.00 Sound Of My Dream 2 (Variety)
9.00 The Entertainer (PG) (CC) (Drama)
11.00 News Tonight (News)
11.30 Sound Of My Dream 2 (Variety)
AM
1.30 Lord Of Shanghai (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.30 Close

CHANNEL NEWSASIA

AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
6.30 Correspondents' Diary
7.00 News Now
7.30 Asia Business First Weekend
8.00 News Now
8.30 Edible Wild
9.00 News Now
9.30 This Weekend
10.02 Conversation With
10.30 Super Octogenarians
11.00 News Now
11.30 Correspondents' Diary
PM
12.00 News Now
12.30 Asia Business First Weekend
1.02 Japan Hour (English Subtitles)
2.00 News Now
2.30 Money Mind
3.00 News Now

3.30 The Making Of Singapore On Film
4.02 Conversation With
4.30 Super Octogenarians
5.00 News Now
5.30 Asia Business First Weekend
6.00 News Now
6.30 Correspondents' Diary
7.02 Once A Refugee (CC)
7.30 This Weekend (CC)
8.00 Primetime Asia
8.30 Asia Business First Weekend
9.02 Blueprint For Survival (CC)
10.00 Singapore Tonight
10.30 On The Red Dot – Risky Business (CC)
11.02 Trump's Showdown
AM
12.00 News Now
12.30 This Weekend
1.02 Asia Business First Weekend
1.30 On The Red Dot – Risky Business (CC)
2.00 News Now
2.30 Money Mind
3.02 Conversation With
3.30 Super Octogenarians
4.00 News Now
4.30 Once A Refugee
5.02 Blueprint For Survival
Programmes may be pre-empted by breaking news

VASANTHAM

PM
1.00 Eedo Rakam Aado Rakam (PG) (Movie)
4.00 Idhaya Thamarai (PG) (CC) (Movie)
7.00 OK Kanmani (Schoolkids)
7.30 Ha Ha Ha Sirippu 10 (Variety)
8.00 Vera Level (HD) (CC) (Info-Ed)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Kaavalan (PG) (Movie)
AM
12.00 Tamil Seithi (R) (News)
12.30 Close

OKTO

AM
7.00 Tip The Mouse (Preschool)
7.30 Floogals (Preschool)
8.00 Sesame Street (HD) (Preschool)
9.00 OddBods (Schoolkids)
9.30 Tobot (HD) (Schoolkids)
10.00 Future Card Buddyfight Ace (Schoolkids)
10.30 CardFight! Vanguard (HD) (Schoolkids)
11.00 Lego Ninjago 9 – Hunted (HD) (Schoolkids)
11.30 Extreme Football (HD) (Schoolkids)

PM
12.00 Basic Mini-tary Training (Schoolkids)
12.30 Museum Mysteries (Schoolkids)
1.00 Loud House (Schoolkids)
1.30 Jane And The Dragon (Schoolkids)
2.00 Inazuma Eleven (Schoolkids)
2.30 The Deep (HD) (Schoolkids)
3.00 Future Card Buddyfight (Schoolkids)
3.30 CardFight! Vanguard G: Next (HD) (Preschool)
4.00 Bear Grylls Survival School (HD) (Schoolkids)
4.30 Loud House (Schoolkids)
5.00 Jane And The Dragon (Schoolkids)
5.30 Inazuma Eleven (Schoolkids)
6.00 Totally Totto (HD) (Schoolkids)
6.30 Exlosers 2 (Drama)
7.00 The Deep (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
7.30 Future Card Buddyfight (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
8.00 CardFight! Vanguard G: Next (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
8.30 Bear Grylls Survival School (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
9.00 Ninja Warrior (PG) (CC) (Variety)
9.30 Perfection (CC) (Sports)
10.00 Max Muay Thai: Ultimate Muay Thai (HD) (PG13) (Sports)
AM
12.00 Close

SURIA

AM
10.00 Atuk PhD (Drama)
11.00 Solo (CC) (Info-Ed)
PM
12.00 Balik Sekolah (HD) (Drama)
12.30 Suami Tanpa Cinta (HD) (Drama)
1.30 #Urbanista (HD) (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.00 Isteri Tuan Ihsan (Drama)
3.00 Juara Memasak Milenia (CC) (Variety)
4.00 Meh Sandar Pada Aku (HD) (PG) (Drama)
5.00 Setia Menunggumu (PG) (CC) (Drama)
6.00 Tahu Nahu (HD) (Schoolkids)
6.30 Cakap–Cakap (Variety)
7.00 The Project (CC) (Info-Ed)
7.30 Jalan–Jalan Makan Angin (CC) (IE)
8.00 Berita (HD) (News)
8.30 Wahhhnita (Info–Ed)
9.30 Setia Menunggumu (PG) (CC) (Drama)
10.30 Jiran (Info-Ed)
11.30 Berita (HD) (R) (News)
AM
12.00 Close

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singtelv.com.sg

Horoscope



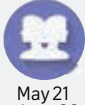
March 21
– April 19

Do not worry too much when the day's obstacles pop up in front of you – there is not much you can do about them. See if your people can help you get around them or just wait it out.



April 20
– May 20

You are intensely practical, but way more fun than that makes you sound. Your energy is terrific and you should be able to get a lot done without sacrificing your good mood.



May 21
– June 20

You have got more going on than anyone realises and your hidden strengths definitely come into play. Make sure your energy is distributed fairly evenly across your endeavours.



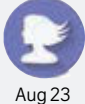
June 21
– July 22

You need to get started on something new – all that good energy is just right for new beginnings. It is a great day for launching an initiative, getting to know someone new or starting over.



July 23
– Aug 22

You need to avoid temptation – even the least amount of backsliding can lead to all sorts of terrible results. Overdoing it is a real concern for you or at least it should be.



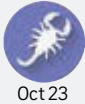
Aug 23
– Sept 22

Your thoughts are much easier to express, so make sure you have the attention of the right people. It is a good idea to write them down, so you can consult them later.



Sept 23
– Oct 22

You need to try a lighter touch – things are heavy enough as it is. If you can get your people to chill a little, then life can get back into the groove that it should be in.



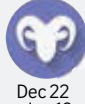
Oct 23
– Nov 21

You need to push ahead if you want to get anything done – the outcome is up to you. See if you can get your people to rally behind you, as it does not hurt to have some assistance.



Nov 22
– Dec 21

Not every day can be a thrilling adventure. Sometimes, you have to deal with the boring realities of everyday life. Things are still freaky, but you have to cope with your chores for a while longer.



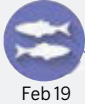
Dec 22
– Jan 19

Make sure your people are having a good time or at least ensure that they do not mind what they are doing. Your great energy should help you do that, as long as you smile.



Jan 20
– Feb 18

Your energy is somewhat grounded, so much so that you might not get much done. It is a good time to sit back and listen as others regale you with stories of past exploits.



Feb 19
– March 20

You like what you hear and want to hear more. It may come from a crush or a potential employer, but you will definitely receive a welcome message of some sort later in the day.

• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
6.40 Pawn Stars 18
7.05 Storage Wars 12
7.35 The Pickers 9
8.30 Counting Cars 7
9.30 JFK Declassified: Tracking Oswald
10.25 History Drama: Project Blue Book
11.20 Ancient Aliens 10
PM
12.15 The Curse Of Oak Island 5
1.10 The Curse Of Civil War Gold
2.05 Counting Cars 7
3.00 Head To Head
3.30 The Curse Of Oak Island 5
4.25 Ancient Aliens 10
5.20 History Drama: Project Blue Book
6.15 The Pickers 12
7.10 10 Things You Don't Know About Singapore
8.05 Forged In Fire 5
9.00 Forged In Fire: Knife Or Death
9.55 The Untold Story Of The 90s
11.45 The Pickers 12

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
6.00 Bring It! 2
7.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
PM
12.00 Married At First Sight Australia 4
3.00 I Killed My BFF: Preacher's Daughter
4.35 Seatbelt Psychic
5.00 Born This Way 2
6.00 Tiny House Nation
7.00 Gok's Fill Your House For Free
8.00 Up! Pretty
10.00 The Hunt For The I-5 Killer
11.35 Hoarders 9

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
6.40 Save The Last Dance
8.30 Inkheart
10.15 Toy Story 3
PM
12.00 Pacific Rim: Uprising (NC16)
1.50 The 15:17 To Paris (NC16)
3.20 Bedtime Stories
5.00 The Adventures Of Tintin
6.45 Ready Player One (NC16)
9.00 Geostorm (NC16)
10.45 Super 8
AM
12.35 Girls Trip (M18)
2.35 The HBO Movie Show
3.00 The Beguiled (2017)
4.30 Cape Fear (1991)

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
6.45 Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace
9.00 The Brits Are Coming! (NC16)
10.30 Renegades (NC16)

PM
12.15 Patriots Day (NC16)
2.25 Mighty Joe Young (PG)
4.20 Smokey And The Bandit 2
6.00 Star Wars: Episode VI – Return Of The Jedi
8.15 Unbreakable
10.00 Black Hawk Down (NC16)
AM
12.20 The Godfather Part 2l
3.35 Star Wars: Episode VI – Return Of The Jedi
5.50 Tequila Sunrise

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
6.30 Wok Of Love (HD)
7.45 Happy Camp 2 (HD)
9.30 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 4 (HD)
10.30 Momo's Paradise 4 (HD)
11.00 Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf – Flying Island: The Sky Adventure (HD)
11.30 Young Travellers' Survival Handbook (HD)
PM
12.00 Follow Me 8 (HD)
12.30 Perfect Match 6 (HD)
2.00 Maritime Silk Road
3.00 Familiar Taste (HD)
4.30 Taste Taiwan 3 (HD)
5.00 Liao Zhai 4 (HD)
7.00 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 4 (HD)
8.00 I Am The Actor (HD)
10.00 Sweet Dreams (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
6.00 ISU Four Continents Figure Skating Championships: Pairs Free Skating
8.30 Spirit Of Yachting 2018
9.00 Multi Sport: Fise World Series 2018 Highlights: Hiroshima
10.00 Tennis: Deuce
10.30 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered
11.00 ISU Four Continents Figure Skating Championships: Men's Free Skating
PM
3.00 Asean Basketball League: Westports Malaysia Dragons Vs Macau Black Bears
4.30 Tennis: ATP Champions Tour 2018
5.00 Horse Racing: FEI Equestrian World
5.30 Spirit Of Yachting 2018: Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race (Alive & Kicking)
6.00 Motorsports: FIA World RallyCross Championships 2018 Round 10 USA Highlights
7.00 BMX Supercross 2017: Lane 1 – Show 3
7.30 BMX Supercross 2017: Lane 1 – Show 4
8.00 Tennis: Federation Cup By BNP Paribas First Round: Czech Republic Vs Romania : Day 2
AM
3.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
5.00 ISU Four Continents Figure Skating Championships: Ice Dance Free Dance

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
6.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
7.00 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series Round 3 Hamilton: Match 41 (13th Place)
7.30 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series Round 3 Hamilton: Match 42 Challenge Trophy
8.00 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series Round 3 Hamilton: Match 43 (5th Place)
8.30 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series Round 3 Hamilton: Match 44 (Bronze Medal Finals)
9.00 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series Round 3 Hamilton: Match 45 (Cup Finals)
10.00 Football: Coppa Italia Highlights
10.30 The Football Review
11.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
11.30 National Basketball League Round 17: Adelaide 36ers Vs Melbourne United (Live)
PM
1.30 Laguna Phuket Triathlon 2018
2.30 Asean Basketball League: Westports Malaysia Dragons Vs Macau Black Bears (Live)
4.30 Wrestling: WWE Afterburn (PG)
5.30 Football: EFL Championships 2018 Matchday 31: Stoke City Vs West Bromwich Albion
8.00 Football: EFL Championship 2018 Matchday 31: Norwich City Vs Ipswich Town (Live)
10.00 National Basketball League Round 17: Adelaide 36ers Vs Melbourne United
AM
12.00 Wrestling: WWE Afterburn (PG)
1.00 Magazine: Trans World Sport
2.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
2.30 Asean Basketball League: Mono Vampire Basketball Club Vs CLS Knights Indonesia
4.30 National Basketball League: Round 17 New Zealand Breakers Vs Adelaide 36ers

HUB SPORTS 3 (CHANNEL 204)

AM
7.00 Golf: Morning Drive 2018
9.00 Golf: European Tour: Vic Open Day 4
PM
2.00 School Of Golf
2.30 Golf: The Skill Code
3.00 Golf: Feherty 2018 (Stewart Cink & Paul Goydos)
4.00 Golf Advisor Round Trip 2018
4.30 Golf Channel Academy
5.00 Golf: European Tour: Vic Open Day 4
10.30 Golf: Feherty 2018 (Ian Poulter)
11.30 Golf: Best Lessons Ever 2018
AM
12.00 Golf Channel Academy
12.30 Golf: The Skill Code
1.00 Golf: Sunshine Tour: Eye Of Africa PGA Championships Highlights
2.00 Golf: European Tour: Vic Open Day 1

Singtel TV

DISCOVERY (HD) (CHANNEL 202)

AM
6.35 Gold Rush 9
7.25 How To Build... Everything
7.50 The Mind Control Freaks
8.15 Nasa's Unexplained Files
9.05 Wheeler Dealers 14
9.55 Speed Is The New Black 2
10.45 How Do They Do It? 15
11.35 Incredible Engineering Blunders: Fixed
PM
12.25 Strip The Cosmos 3
4.35 The 1980s: The Deadliest Decade 2
5.25 Gold Rush 9
6.15 Manhunt With Joel Lambert
7.10 Ed Stafford: First Man Out
8.05 Pandamonium
9.00 Revealed: Malaysia's Royal Rites
9.55 Ed Stafford: First Man Out
10.50 Darkness
11.45 The 1980s: The Deadliest Decade 2

TLC (HD) (CHANNEL 254)

AM
6.35 Zumbo's Just Desserts
7.25 90 Day Fiance 6
9.05 Outdaughtered 3
9.55 Buddy's Big Bakedown
10.45 Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party 2
11.35 Bizarre Foods With Andrew Zimmern 10
PM
12.25 Dr Pimple Popper
1.15 Cruise The World
1.40 Seoul Insider
2.05 The Little Couple 9
2.55 Star Plates
3.45 Jamie & Jimmy's Food Fight Club 5
4.35 What If We Get Married?
5.25 Cruise The World
5.50 Seoul Insider
6.15 Separated At Birth
7.10 Outdaughtered 3
8.05 Dr Pimple Popper
9.00 Star Plates
9.55 Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party 2
10.50 Buddy's Big Bakedown
11.45 Fast Food Mania

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

AM
6.00 Team Ninja Warrior 2
7.40 Seal Team 2
8.30 Supernatural 14
9.20 Asia's Got Talent 3
11.05 Vantage Point
PM
12.45 Hawaii Five-0 9
1.35 Identity
3.15 The Amazing Race 29
5.45 MacGyver 3

6.35 Seal Team 2
7.20 The Blacklist 6
8.15 Hawaii Five-0 9
9.05 Asia's Got Talent 3
10.55 The Karate Kid (2010)

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

AM
6.00 Friends 9
7.00 Wonder Boy
8.45 Harry Potter And The Half-Blood Prince
11.35 Rush Hour 3
PM
1.15 The Legend Of Tarzan
3.15 The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King
6.55 San Andreas
9.00 The Lego Movie
10.50 Harry Potter And The Order Of The Phoenix

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

AM
6.00 The Reaction Hall Of Fame
7.20 Super Ultimate Candid Camera
8.00 Mr Bean
9.05 Just For Laughs Gags 14
9.30 Neil Patrick Harris – Circus Awesomous
10.40 Saturday Night Live 44
11.25 The Daily Show 24
11.55 Corporate
PM
1.35 Back To School Special
2.20 The Comedy Jam
3.10 Amazingness
3.55 Detroiters
4.15 Above Average Presents
4.20 Detroiters
4.45 Saturday Night Live 44
5.30 Amazingness
6.20 Comedy Central Roast Of Donald Trump
7.25 Stand-up, Asia! 3
8.25 Idiotsitter
9.10 The Jim Jefferies Show
10.05 Funny As Hell 4
11.10 Inside Amy Schumer 2
11.35 Russell Simmons Presents 2

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

AM
6.00 Stylish Man
7.00 The Legend Of Golden Music
8.00 Glorious World
8.30 The Golden Melodies 2018
10.00 All Out Of Love
PM
12.00 Stylish Man
1.00 The Golden Melodies 2018
2.30 All Out Of Love
4.30 The Legend Of Golden Music
5.30 Glorious World
6.00 Stylish Man

7.00 All Out Of Love
9.00 Super Nightclub
10.30 Top Singers

VIDEO ON DEMAND

1 Phantom Thread (HD) (Latest)
2 Mr Unbelievable (Mandarin)
3 Nasi Tangas (Cine Ekspres)
4 Silukkuvarpatti Singam (Kollywood)
5 Kaala Hindi (Bollywood)
Programmes available anytime on demand

MIO STADIUM (HD) (CHANNEL 102)

AM
6.00 PL: Crystal Palace Vs West Ham United
8.00 PL: Watford Vs Everton
10.00 Premier League Express
PM
12.00 Premier League HQ
1.00 PL: Fulham Vs Manchester United
3.00 PL: Huddersfield Town Vs Arsenal
5.00 PL: Preview (Big Match)
5.30 PL: Liverpool Vs AFC Bournemouth
7.30 Premier League HQ
8.30 PL: Matchday Pre-show (Live)
9.30 PL: Tottenham Hotspur Vs Leicester City (Live)
AM
12.00 PL



Dine off Paris’ beaten track

Instead of popular venues like the restaurant in the Eiffel Tower, opt for a romantic meal at these hidden spots

Suzanne Sng

Paris as the City of Love has become a cliché, almost, but even the most hardened cynic will find it difficult not to fall for its charms.

At every turn, there is a romantic Instagram-worthy spot – a graceful Art Deco metro entrance, a corner bistro with matching red wicker chairs, a busker with an accordion serenading passers-by with *La Vie En Rose* and, of course, the Eiffel Tower popping up unexpectedly above grey Haussmann buildings. There is also dog poop lurking every few hundred steps on the pavement, but let’s not destroy the illusion.

If you want to say “*Je t’aime*” without hordes of tourists intruding, avoid those love locks on the bridges across the River Seine and head to these five romantic dining spots.

stlife@sph.com.sg

DINING TIPS

For dinner at popular restaurants, reservations are highly recommended.

Or you can try your luck by turning up the moment they open their doors (usually at 7pm), as the French typically do not dine at that hour.

A bread basket comes with every meal but only super fancy places will serve butter. The bread is meant to accompany the entire meal, so do not fill up too much on it before the appetisers arrive.

It is also not unusual to see locals mopping up the gravy from their mains with hunks of bread.

Do not feel pressured to order bottled water when asked if you want still or sparkling. It is perfectly acceptable to ask for tap water, which will be placed in a carafe on the table for you to help yourself.

At the end of the meal, ask for the bill with “*L’addition, s’il vous plaît*”.

Tipping is not expected, but if the service was good, it is always nice to round up the bill or add a 5 per cent tip.

For exceptional service, go up to 10 per cent.



1

LE TRAIN BLEU

(www.le-train-bleu.com)

For a trip back in time

If you are looking to make a grand gesture or perhaps pop “The Question”, then Le Train Bleu is your top pick.

Tucked rather incongruously above the hustle and bustle of the Gare de Lyon train station, the restaurant is a most romantic moment frozen in time – 1901, to be exact, which was when it opened.

Overwhelmingly opulent and a sensory overload of gilt, the cavernous interior is dripping with crystal chandeliers and almost every possible surface is smothered with frescoes.

The food comes with a similar wow factor (with prices to match; the Valentine’s Day set menu is €140 or S\$215 a person).

The flambe dishes, in particular, are showstoppers. Consider this a once-in-a-lifetime splurge.

2

CANARD ET CHAMPAGNE

(www.canardetchampagne.com)

For the odd couple

Duck and champagne are an unlikely combination, but it is a brilliant coupling at this modern-meets-traditional bistro.

Choose from French classics such as duck confit and seared duck breast or go for the satisfyingly meaty duck burger, all made with free-range organic ducks.

Pair it with the bubbly sourced from small producers in the country.

Getting to the restaurant is a romantic journey as you have to traipse through a secret passage to get there.

The Passages des Panoramas, the oldest covered passage in Paris, is a maze of shops selling wine, vintage books and collectible stamps, and the area probably does not look much different from when it was built 220 years ago.

3

UN THE DANS LE JARDIN AT THE MUSEE DE LA VIE ROMANTIQUE
(museevieromantique.paris.fr)

For the total romantic

This is the ultimate romantic rendezvous – a museum devoted to Romanticism, complete with a darling tea room.

Highlights of the museum include plaster casts of literary figure George Sand’s right arm and her lover Frederic Chopin’s left hand.

After a leisurely tour of the paintings and sculptures of the Romantic era – entry to the permanent collection is free – retreat to the tea room.

There, in a shoe box-sized glasshouse, you are sheltered against the elements and perhaps even the realities of life, as you sip tea and nibble on delicate organic pastries from Rose Bakery.

If you are lucky, you may be able to snag the only two seats in a little balcony nook, where you can utter sweet nothings to each other in private.

4

HUITRIERIE REGIS

(huitrierie-regis.com)

For a dose of aphrodisiac

The food of love is not, well, music. It is oysters.

Slurp up these aphrodisiacs, freshly shucked and super succulent, in this intimate oyster bar the size of a postage stamp.

Feed each other the molluscs driven up daily from Marennes-Oleron, the famed oyster fields in the south-west of France, or choose from seasonal offerings such as clams, sea urchin and shrimps.

To put you in the mood, wash it all down with some champagne.

The place is always packed, so turn up the moment it opens, as it does not accept reservations.

Alternatively, you can canoodle at the bar while you wait for a table and watch the oyster shucker at work. This is about as fresh as it gets.

5

LE CHALET DES ILES

(chalet-des-iles.com)

For those willing to go the distance

This restaurant in the middle of a lake takes “off the beaten track” to a new level.

In the day, during the warm seasons, you can get to it by renting a rowboat (€12 an hour) and spend a couple of idyllic hours rowing on the lake with your beloved before and after lunch.

If you do not fancy working up a sweat, there is a free barge with a boatman to take you across the water, which is no less poetic.

Time your arrival at sunset for maximum effect.

If that is not romantic enough, the restaurant is decorated like a cosy ski chalet, with dark woods, dim lights and plush velvet seats.

There are small plates on the menu, such as salmon tataki and foie gras, which are perfect for sharing.

PHOTOS:
LE TRAIN BLEU,
FRENCH PARADOX,
MUSEE DE LA VIE
ROMANTIQUE,
HUITRIERIE REGIS,
SUZANNE SNG

• Suzanne Sng is a former Straits Times journalist based in Paris as an independent editorial consultant.

MODERN LOVE

Barefoot romance



A curved boardwalk connects Koh Ouen, where the resorts' 24 villas are located, to Koh Bong, where the rainforest has been preserved.
ST PHOTOS: CLARA LOCK

Song Saa private island offers surprises at every turn and a chance to do good for the local community



Clara Lock

I am dining by the water's edge on my first night at Song Saa private island, when a waitress approaches me excitedly.

"Look," she says, pointing to something in the ocean. I follow her gaze and spy a few luminous blue-green specks, glittering like stars, dancing in the inky water.

It usually takes a combination of a moonless sky, calm seas and a boat tour at night to catch a glimpse of these bioluminescent plankton and I am lucky to spot them so close to shore.

It is the first of many surprises during my five-day stay on Song Saa island, a luxury resort located off the coast of Cambodia. Song Saa means "the sweethearts" in the Khmer language.

Some surprises are orchestrated by the Guest Experiences team, which leaves rolled-up notes tied to my door each afternoon informing me where dinner that night will be hosted.

Other surprises are sprung by mother nature, like the school of damselfish that swarms below the glass floor of my over-water villa while I am having breakfast, their skinny silver bodies shimmering in the morning light.

Yet, more surprises come from exploring the resort's many nooks and crannies. I wander down various paths and find a cabana shrouded by trees, a beachfront deck with beanbags and a coffee table, and a restroom with a floor-to-ceiling view of the ocean.

These spaces, made and decorated with upcycled materials such as driftwood, old boat skeletons and dried jungle vines, are one way the resort embodies barefoot luxury.

The term, which has become a popular description for luxury resorts in the last five to 10 years, refers to elegance without excess – an aesthetic that fits into the natural environment and eco-friendly practices such as recycling, composting and building with sustainable, locally sourced material.

Song Saa takes it a step further. Since 2013, the company's non-profit arm, Song Saa Foundation,

has brought clean water and education to the local community in nearby Koh Rong island, hired locals to clean up the island and taught residents about recycling and waste management.

Guests are encouraged to take part in the process, either by joining monthly beach clean-up sessions or a tour to Prek Svay village, one of five villages in the Koh Rong archipelago that the foundation supports.

Prek Svay is only a 10-minute speedboat ride from Song Saa, but they are worlds apart. Fishing is the main source of income for the 200 or so families in the village, who supplement it by farming, carpentry or running small businesses such as provision stores.

Some harvest cashews or coconuts; others craft bamboo straws. They sell these products to Song Saa island as well as buyers in Sihanoukville, a coastal city which is a 45-minute speedboat ride away.

I learn all this from Mr Ngoun Chhay, a marine officer from the Song Saa Foundation who grew up in the village.

His three children receive free education at the village school, where the foundation pays the salaries and accommodation of the teachers. Children in the village also get a hands-on experience recycling, composting and growing plants and herbs at a community centre called Sala Song Saa.

"We want to create a net positive in the world because so many people are already taking from it," says programme manager Ben Thorne.

THE STORY BEHIND SONG SAA

Song Saa is made up of twin islands called Koh Ouen and Koh Bong, and founders Rory and Melita Hunter have a sweet story to go with the romantic name.

The Australian couple, who were living in Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, in 2006, rented a fishing boat to travel the archipelago and fell in love with the islands' beauty.

They took up a village chief's offer to sell them a pair of islands for US\$15,000 and spent the next six years turning Song Saa into a tiny corner of paradise. They recruited the islands' former residents to work in jobs from driving boats to landscaping. About 90 per cent of the resort's staff are Cambodian, with many learning English on the job.

Mr Chhay, 37, tells me that when he was hired to work in Song Saa's laundry team six years ago, the only English words he knew were "yes", "no" and "how are you".

He now leads tours to Prek Svay village while learning about environmental issues such as climate change and ocean acidification.

His is the kind of success story the Hunters hope to recreate with



Activities at Song Saa include morning yoga classes by the sea.

their next project, the Song Saa Reserve.

The integrated resort, which is open to investors, will include multiple hotels, resorts and residential properties committed to sustainable practices such as hiring and training local staff and restoring native flora and fauna.

It will be located near the Angkor Wat temple complex in Siem Reap, with the first luxury and wellness resort set to open in 2021.

Mr Hunter says: "This project allows Cambodia to show the world how tourism, when done right, is a powerful means for lifting people out of poverty and protecting the environment."

LONGER DAYS ON THE ISLAND

Life on Song Saa is languid, with clocks set to island time. This is an hour later than the rest of Cambodia, to allow for longer days – the sun rises at a comfortable 7.30am and sunset is just after 7pm.

If you are the sort that likes to be kept busy, there is a lot to do. Yoga classes on the infinity-pool deck feel extra invigorating because of the sea breeze and expansive view; the golden hour just before sunset is the perfect time to rent a kayak or stand-up paddle board and discover the island as it is bathed in brilliant hues.

A curved boardwalk connects Koh Ouen, where the resorts' 24 villas are located, to Koh Bong, where the rainforest remains untouched.

It takes me about 1½ hours to explore all three paths, while community engagement officer Long Thy points out the rattan plants used to make string and furniture, palm leaves that locals use to wrap food, and flying foxes roosting in the trees.

On the boardwalk back to Koh Ouen, Mr Thy tells me that barracuda, rabbitfish and grouper are common in these waters. I know these names from the dining

table, but in the 200m marine reserve that rings the islands, many species thrive because they are friends, not food.

Resident marine scientist Kristy Potgieter says on a clear day, when visibility is about 10 to 15m underwater, she has even seen marbled stingrays, colourful wrasse and venomous lionfish in nearby coral reefs.

But when you are staying in a villa that comes with a private infinity pool and a view of the ocean, there is no need to do anything but lounge on your daybed and graze on snacks from an all-day dining menu.

These include a banana blossom salad, which is made with the banana flower, and amok, a traditional Cambodian dish of thick curry.

Many of these ingredients are grown in the chef's garden, where executive chef Jeremy Simeon also harvests basil, mint, water lily stems and lotus shoots, using them in contemporary Cambodian dishes such as scallop ceviche and snapper with coconut green curry.

On my last night, when I return to my villa, there is one last surprise waiting for me – half a coconut husk on my already-made bed, containing a small "wishing stone" and a tiny scroll.

The note urges me to think of the things in my life that bring me joy and to hold these thoughts as I drop my stone into the water.

I make my way to the water's edge outside my villa, where across the bay, the lights of Prek Svay village sparkle. Then, I make a wish for the people there and return my stone to the ocean.

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• This trip was sponsored by Song Saa Private Island. Villa rates start at US\$890 (S\$1,205) a night, with an additional US\$552 for food, drinks and selected alcoholic beverages. For more information, go to www.songsaa.com



A 10-minute speedboat ride from Song Saa, Prek Svay village is the place to meet locals, visit a school and learn about the Song Saa Foundation's community outreach programme.

GETTING THERE

I flew on Air Asia to Sihanoukville, with a layover in Kuala Lumpur.

From Sihanoukville International Airport, it is a 25-minute drive to the port, followed by a 45-minute speedboat ride to Song Saa island.

TRAVEL TIPS

- The boat ride to Song Saa island can be choppy, so those prone to seasickness may want to take a motion-sickness pill about half an hour before setting out.

- Footwear is optional on Koh Ouen, but shoes are recommended for exploring Koh Bong's dirt trails, which may be slippery when wet.

- If you would like to make an in-kind donation, non-profit organisation Pack for a Purpose lists some useful items such as first aid and stationery supplies. Go to bit.ly/2GeJXMk for a full list.



SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

- You will be surrounded by nature, so be prepared for bugs – especially in Koh Bong's lush vegetation. The resort supplies a natural insect repellent made with essential oils.

Eco-friendly escape



SCAN TO WATCH



<http://str.sg/songsaa>



ARTS AND FOODIE PARADISE
IN TAICHUNG, TAIWAN

From the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts to the outdoor CMP Block Museum of Arts, Taichung is replete with attractions to get your creative juices flowing.

For a dose of colour, visit the Rainbow Military Dependents' Village (left). Formerly a housing settlement for veterans, it has single-handedly been transformed into a street art attraction by former soldier Huang Yung-fu, who still lives in the village.

The walls of houses and alleys are covered in bright, eye-catching murals so there are plenty of opportunities to snap Instagram-worthy pictures.

Bubble-tea aficionados are also in for a treat as local teahouse Chun Shui Tang is widely regarded as one of the first to offer the beverage.

Make a trip to the original store in Siwei Street to sip on bubble tea and make your own drink at NT\$269 (\$\$11.80) a person.

Cap off the day with a visit to Feng Chia Night Market, Taichung's largest night market. Bask in the nightlife and feast on scallion pancakes, fried sweet potato balls and glutinous rice-stuffed sausages. Wash them down with an iced taro drink.

Dining alone is never an awkward affair as many tourists and locals often eat on the go.

Flying solo

It's the season of love and social media will soon be inundated with photos of couples on romantic getaways. If you are travelling alone, there is no need to feel left out. Be it adventure or cultural experiences, an ideal vacation spot awaits your party of one. **Desiree Loh** reports



HIKING ADVENTURES
IN HONG KONG

Besides dim sum, Disneyland and days' worth of shopping destinations, Hong Kong is also known for its hiking trails.

Ms Cheryl Lim chose to travel there for her first solo hiking trip last month because its trails are well documented and easy to find. The 31-year-old, who is in between jobs, completed 10 trails during her five-day trip. "There are many blogs detailing the different trails and it's so easy to access all this information online," she says.

The Hong Kong Tourism Board website (www.discoverhongkong.com) lists more than 30 trails of var-

ious levels of difficulty, with information on how to get to the starting points and the estimated time needed to complete a hike.

"Hong Kong is a good place to start solo hiking because it's cheaper than Himalayan countries like Bhutan and Tibet, and there wasn't much of a language barrier for me," says Ms Lim. "I also felt safer because it's closer to home."

Travellers who do not want to venture too far from the city can use trails in urban locations.

For example, the 3km Wan Chai Gap Road trail (above) starts from the streets of Wan Chai on Hong Kong Island and takes only 1½ hours to complete.



SERENE PARKS IN KYOTO, JAPAN

Enjoy some alone time in peaceful parks and shrines.

The Kyoto Gyoen National Garden, which surrounds the Kyoto Imperial Palace, is a tranquil sanctuary where you can escape from the hustle and bustle of city life.

During spring, from March to May, the cherry blossoms are a sight to behold.

Not only is the park open throughout the day, but entry is also free.

The former capital of Japan is also famous for its temples and shrines.

When Mr Tan Cai Jin, 22, visited it last December, exploring historical sites such as the Fushimi Inari Shrine and Kiyomizu-dera Temple

(above) alone was a plus point.

"I enjoy learning about the history of these places and I could take my time since I was by myself. If I'd travelled with my friends, most of them wouldn't have wanted to read about the history of the place," says the National University of Singapore undergraduate.

"It's good to be alone since you're supposed to be quiet and respectful at these places anyway," he adds.

Many tourist sites are accessible by bus so, to save on costs, solo travellers who intend to cover many attractions in one day can buy the Kyoto Bus One-Day Pass for 600 yen (\$\$7.40) from subway stations.

PHOTOS: ENGLAND'S HISTORIC CITIES, EU HOLIDAYS, GUIDE TO ICELAND, JNTO, TURISMO DE SEVILLA, WONG WAI PING



HISTORY AND CULTURE IN LONDON

For solo travellers who want to steep themselves in culture, London (above) is the place to be.

Get up close to dinosaur fossils at the Natural History Museum, be amazed by Picasso and Warhol's masterpieces at Tate Modern or delve into the history of World War I at Imperial War Museum London.

Entrance to many of London's museums is free and solo travellers have the luxury of taking their time to peruse artefacts and admire paintings.

If you would like an in-depth experience of the city, there are also numerous walking tours.

For instance, award-winning urban walking tour company London Walks (www.walks.com) has numerous themed tours where participants can embark on journeys to learn about mediaeval London, see Harry Potter filming locations or discover London's hidden old pubs.

These tours last for two hours, cost £10 (\$\$17.50) an adult and have qualified guides at the helm.

Once you have had your fill of roaming around, catch one of the many theatrical performances in the West End, including hits such as Wicked and stage renditions of movies such as School Of Rock.



PICTURESQUE VIEWS IN ICELAND

Traverse breathtaking landscapes with peace of mind in the world's safest country. Last year, Iceland topped the Global Peace Index for the eighth consecutive year, making it the perfect destination for first-time solo travellers who may be concerned about navigating a foreign country alone.

Take a dip in the iconic Blue Lagoon, hike up glaciers and chase the Northern Lights (above) when night falls.

If you do not have a driving licence and cannot take a road trip to these scenic spots, Guide to Iceland (www.guidetoiceland.is) offers day tours to many popular attractions.

The tours include an English-speaking guide and free pick-ups from convenient locations around

the capital Reykjavik, such as hotels.

Individuals can sign up for these group tours alone at affordable prices. For instance, the South Coast Day Tour takes travellers on a 10-hour minibus trip along south Iceland at \$152 a person, with sightings of gorgeous waterfalls, white glacial ice caps and puffin colonies packed into the itinerary.

If you do not want to travel out of the city every day, there are landmarks that offer stunning views in Reykjavik itself.

For a panoramic view of the capital, head up to the top of the 74.5m-tall Hallgrímskirkja, Iceland's largest church. Visible from almost anywhere in the city, the church is located in the centre of Reykjavik so tourists can locate it easily.



STUNNING ARCHITECTURE
IN SEVILLE, SPAIN

Marvel at renowned historical monuments in Seville and take a deep dive into the city's rich history.

The architecture of the centuries-old Royal Alcazar of Seville (above), for example, is a fusion of styles, with Arabic, Mudéjar, Renaissance and Baroque influences. Declared a Unesco World Heritage Site in 1987, it is one of the oldest European palaces still in use, with the Spanish royal family using it as their official residence in Seville.

Madam Maria Ng, 55, who spent a week in Seville last April, counts the city as one of her favourite solo travel destinations.

"It has vibrancy and culture, and popular tourist attractions like the Cathedral of Seville and the Royal Alcazar of Seville are within walk-

ing distance of each other, so it is easy to get around," says the garment retailer.

Her vacation coincided with the April Fair, a week-long festival where residents of Seville dress up in their finery and celebrate with food, dance and horseback parades.

"It was so fun because the whole city went crazy with the festivities and I got the chance to take pictures with all the beauties in their flamenco dresses," she says.

The city is known as the birthplace of flamenco dancing and, at the Flamenco Dance Museum (www.museodelbaileflamenco.com/en/), visitors can learn about the history and costumes of the dance. It also has live performances, with tickets starting at €22 (\$\$33.80).

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MODERN LOVE

Ode to offal

The unloved spare parts of animals are one of my greatest food pleasures



Tan Hsueh Yun
Food Editor

Unloved, unwanted, unappreciated. Dismissed as the “spare parts” of an animal. Prime cuts of meat are prized, but offal is not cherished. I happen to love the stuff – hearts, livers, gizzards, tripe, lungs, blood, hoofs and other parts that some people will find off-putting. I am told, after putting up photos of offal hanging in Hong Kong wet market stalls on Facebook, that the post should have come with a warning. About what? That animals have organs? That they bleed so we can eat? Some readers would have turned this page hastily, on seeing the photo that accompanies this piece. If you’re still reading, let’s talk organ meats. It started, for me, with liver. I must have been about five. My

parents, both adventurous eaters, made no concessions to finicky kiddie appetites. My younger sister was a picky eater, but I was expected to eat – and enjoy – everything my parents ate. I was that weird kid who liked mushrooms and spoonfuls of cod liver oil. My parents had already introduced me to the joy of fried sacs of fish roe and it was time for even more esoteric things. One bite of rich chicken liver, which came with a meal of chicken rice, and I was smitten. The slight bitterness, the creaminess of slightly underdone liver, which I dipped in dark soya sauce, made me swoon. When the parents realised I was unfazed by it, they started adding pig liver to my diet – thick triangular slices of them, which my mother stir-fried with ginger and scallions, or cooked in a claypot in a zi char place, the gravy spooned over rice. The trick is to undercook the liver so that it is pink inside. The slices are more tender this way. After developing a taste for liver, there was no stopping me. From there, I graduated to mee sua with pork ribs, liver and kidney on my birthdays. My mother would soak the kidneys for days in water, sticking the container in the fridge and changing the water twice a day. The end result was beautiful springiness with not a trace of funk. Soon, I started on kway chap, offal served with sheets of rice noodles; then digging out every bit



Pig snouts at Bowrington Market in Hong Kong. ST PHOTO: TAN HSUEH YUN

of marrow from a bowl of sup tulang and splattering everything I wore with red gravy; and polishing off stick after stick of easier-to-eat paru or beef lung satay. I thought I’d died and gone to heaven when I discovered hati babi bungkus, a Peranakan dish of pork and liver balls wrapped in caul fat – the snow white, lacy membrane that covers animal organs. Double the offal delight. You must be thinking that my cholesterol level is through the roof. No, it’s boringly normal. I don’t eat offal every day, although I’d love to. Research has shown that cholesterol in food has a small effect on LDL, the so-called “bad” cholesterol. So eggs, offal and prawns are okay in moderation. Another reason to include offal in the diet: It is nutritionally dense, providing vitamins, minerals, iron and good quality protein. Mostly, I eat offal because it gives me pleasure, but I also see it as a way of respecting the animal that gave its life to sustain me. The least I can do is to eat as many parts of it as possible. One of my best offal eating experiences was in Rome in 2012

at Checchino dal 1887. I was determined to try its pajata, the intestines of unweaned calves, after reading about it in restaurateur Joe Bastianich’s 2012 book, Restaurant Man. The restaurant is in Monte Testaccio, an area where slaughter houses were located in days of yore. Workers there were given offal to supplement their income and they would take them to the restaurants in the area to be cooked. Now, pajata is a very special offal. The enzymes curdle the milk in the intestines so that it has the texture of ricotta cheese. Cooked with tomatoes and served over pasta, it is sublime. Because the restaurant was empty but for two tables on the night I dined there, the owner took time to tell me about those intestines and the history of the area. It was the best meal of my trip. Two years ago, in Paris, my sister and I shared a whole calf’s brain at Clown Bar restaurant. It came in a pool of ponzu and was showered with chopped scallions. The texture was perfect, like warm custard. Nothing else I ate in that city came close to being as good. In London, I will never forget Las

Americas in Brixton, a South American butchery and restaurant now sadly shuttered. My friends and I had a huge meal there. Arepas, bread made with white cornmeal, oozing cheese, were excellent but the best thing was a platter of pig’s head stuffed with rice. We’d seen the magnificent head sitting on the counter and ordered a portion. In Japan, I have had some excellent offal too. Gyu tan, or beef tongue, in yakiniku places; fermented squid guts in any number of izakaya, chased down with highballs. There was also one raucous night at Akitaya in Hamamatsucho, which a reader had recommended. My friend and I joined the drunken aunties and uncles who populated the place, feasting on pig and cow offal, including fallopian tubes, throat and other very esoteric parts. It helped that my friend is Japanese and as excited about offal as I am. Because animal blood is not allowed in Singapore, I take every opportunity to eat it while abroad. In Bangkok, Or Tor Kor Market, one of my favourite places on earth, has a stall selling duck noodles. You can add cubes of duck blood to your bowl and the QQ texture is perfect. At Chan Kan Kee, a Chiu Chow restaurant in Hong Kong’s Sheung Wan district, a plate of goose blood is de rigueur, together with the braised goose and oyster porridge. Other happy hunting grounds for offal include Taipei, where humble eateries almost always serve perfectly cleaned intestines, liver and pig’s ears. At Da-wan, a yakiniku restaurant in the Da’an district, I insisted on having pig vocal chords. They curled up on the grill and were supremely crunchy. Singapore is no slouch in the offal department either. Woh Hup, a zi char stall at Hong Lim Food Centre, serves fish intestines fried with beansprouts. Even in a hotel buffet, you can find excellent offal. At the newly revamped Orchard Cafe in Orchard Hotel, there is smoky, hot-off-the-charcoal-grill duck heart and beef tripe satay. Soon Li Yong Tau Foo in Bukit Merah View serves offal such as pig intestines, stomach, kidneys and

liver. They are so much more compelling than the usual stuffed beancurd, fish balls and vegetables. For my fix of claypot liver, I head to Keng Eng Kee Seafood in Alexandra Village. If you ask nicely and book ahead, chef Alysia Chan of The Black Swan in Cecil Street will saute chicken hearts in sherry for you. They are ultra tender, and all I want is to inhale them, then dunk chunks of sourdough bread in the juices. There is a whole sub-cuisine of offal braised in soya sauce and there are many good places here to get it. Chi-chi types should head to Imperial Treasure Fine Teochew Cuisine at Ion Orchard or Tanjong Pagar Centre. The pig ears and duck tongues are especially good. When I feel the urge for kway chap, I head to Quan Lai Guo Zhi in MacPherson Road or Garden Street Kway Chap in Serangoon Garden. No doubt you will tell me there are better places. I am counting on that. Recently though, I found a soya-braised offal place that trumps them all. My mother and I were walking back to the car after a lunch of soya sauce chicken at Xiang Jiang at the hawker centre in Alexandra Village, when we passed a stall selling braised duck. Teochew Braised Duck Rice is such a prosaic name because duck is really the least interesting of its offerings. It was a pile of braised pig snouts that first caught our attention. We were too full at the time, but went back for it. We added large and small pig intestines and other offal, such as duck intestines. All beautiful. Next time, I have to be patient and wait for the pig ears and skin to be ready. The snouts were a joy to eat. Although thick, the chunks were thoroughly infused with the soya braising sauce and full of umami. I shivered with delight as I polished off piece after piece, dipping each one in the vinegary sauce bright with chilli and pungent with garlic. Spare parts? To me, they are vital.

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I toured the home of master potter Iskandar Jalil.

Toh Wen Li
Journalist
The Straits Times



Journalism goes beyond the 24-hour news cycle of current affairs. I have journeyed through the homes of artists and discovered the muse of Singapore's greatest creative minds. As a journalist, you never know what to expect at work. If you're inspired by the spirit of discovery, come take the path less travelled.





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PASSION FOOD



Eunice Quek
Food Correspondent

With Valentine's Day approaching, you and your partner may be looking to ignite some passion in the bedroom. Aside from setting the mood with candlelight and romantic music, taking natural food aphrodisiacs may also help turn up the heat. But do they really work?

Ms Celeste Viviers, a dietitian at Thomson Wellth Clinic, says: "The research on food as an aphrodisiac is scant and inconclusive. But there is no reason one cannot enjoy these foods in moderation. The libido is a subjective concept and what may work for one may not work for another."

"Many other factors affect the sex drive and if a particular food is thought to improve yours, there is no reason to not indulge in your own aphrodisiac."

Still, people are curious about what works and what doesn't, so The Sunday Times puts 10 known food aphrodisiacs to the test.

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PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

OYSTERS

It is said to be high in protein and zinc and was supposedly enjoyed by the 18th-century lover Giacomo Girolamo Casanova. Part of the appeal of oysters is the sensual experience of eating the slippery mollusc.

Verdict: My husband is not a fan of the shellfish and I didn't feel particularly sensual eating it on my own. I devoured half a dozen raw oysters and while they were plump and juicy, I didn't feel extra frisky.

Ms Viviers says: "While a study reports an increase in libido among rats, there are no human studies to support this hypothesis."



STRAWBERRIES

Verdict: I eat strawberries frequently after dinner, so I didn't see much difference after consuming a punnet of it for this experiment. But I tried to make the eating process more romantic by slicing the strawberries to look like hearts and feeding them to my husband. You can make the experience sweeter by preparing chocolate-dipped strawberries, coating them in chocolate or topping a bowl of strawberries with whipped cream. Make sure you pick sweet strawberries as sour ones would be a buzzkill.

Ms Viviers says: "Strawberries are commonly associated with love, but there is no scientific evidence to show they increase libido."

DARK CHOCOLATE

Historically, the Aztecs, an indigenous people in Mexico, believed that cocoa beans could increase one's sexual desire. Dark chocolate contains two important chemical compounds – serotonin and phenylethylamine – for elevating one's mood.

Verdict: Indeed, eating chocolate – there's something about the lush texture of melting chocolate – can be a sensual affair for me. It certainly puts me in a good mood and I think that sharing chocolate fondue or a molten lava cake post-dinner works as a tantalising stimulant.

Ms Viviers says: "Cacao compounds are reported to have an aphrodisiac effect. However, there is little evidence to support this."



POMEGRANATE

Seen as a culinary symbol of Aphrodite, an ancient Greek goddess associated with love and beauty, the fruit is full of antioxidants.

Verdict: I ate the sweet pomegranate arils and drank the juice. I didn't feel particularly aroused afterwards, but I felt refreshed enough for some passion in the bedroom.

Ms Viviers says: "In a 2011 study funded by a pomegranate-related company, it was found that drinking pomegranate juice daily lowered cortisol, a steroid hormone that helps the body respond to stress levels, which can correspond with increased testosterone in men and women. Elevated testosterone can lead to heightened moods and increased sexual desire."



CHILLI PEPPERS

Verdict: I love anything spicy, whether it's sambal, Sichuan peppers or chilli peppers. The tingling feeling on the tongue is particularly pleasurable. Just be careful not to go overboard – a numb tongue or excessive sweating is not exactly arousing. But because I frequently eat spicy food, I'm not sure if it has helped kindle the fire in the bedroom. I guess I should start keeping track.

Ms Viviers says: "While it is believed that capsaicin, found in chilli peppers, causes the release of sex drive-boosting chemicals, there are no studies to support this."

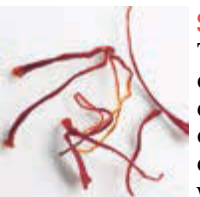


KOREAN RED GINSENG

It is said to treat erectile dysfunction as well as enhance sexual behaviour.

Verdict: I went looking for products containing Korean red ginseng. Among the powders, capsules and tea available, I picked the Beauty Monkey Snow Jelly with Korea Red Ginseng (\$11.70 for a 230g bottle from Redmart) as I figured a drink would be more palatable. Plus, it contains hashima (oviducts of mature female frogs) from Jilin province in China, which is apparently good for the skin. The drink can be consumed chilled or warm, and I share a chilled bottle with my husband. The ginseng flavour in the sweet drink is not too strong, but it did nothing to whet our sexual appetites. Perhaps the amount of ginseng in the drink is quite low and it should be taken over a longer period of time for one to see any aphrodisiac effects.

Ms Viviers says: "Studies have produced mixed results on the aphrodisiac effects of red ginseng, and side effects may include headaches, constipation and gastrointestinal disturbances. Stronger studies are needed to confirm the ginseng's aphrodisiac effects."



SAFFRON

The use of these crimson threads date back to ancient Egyptian queen Cleopatra, who apparently bathed in saffron-infused milk because of its supposed aphrodisiac properties. Today, the expensive spice is used in baking, cooking biryani and stirred into yogurt drinks or milk.

Verdict: Aside from trying it out in drinks and biryani, I figured I could get a possibly stronger dose with the 21st Century Activated Saffron Extract (\$26.96 for a bottle of 60 88.5mg capsules from Redmart). The capsules claim to enhance brain and eye health, and act as an anti-depressant, mental health improver and mood enhancer. Taking pills isn't a sensual experience, though I did feel more energetic.

Ms Viviers says: "A study observed that a group of men given 30mg of saffron per day for four weeks experienced greater improvement in erectile function than those given a placebo. Women reported higher levels of arousal and lubrication. However, other studies show inconsistent results."

GINKGO BILOBA

People may be more familiar with the ginkgo nuts used in Chinese cuisine and desserts, but the ginkgo biloba's leaf extract is commonly used as a herbal supplement. Also known as the maidenhair tree, it is said to help with everything from improving memory to treating anxiety.

Verdict: I tried out the 21st Century Ginkgo Biloba Complex (\$13.50 for 60 500mg tablets from Redmart) which, according to the package information, helps "maintain overall cognitive health, support healthy brain function and blood circulation". I cannot confirm any of the above, but I just treated it as taking a health supplement.

Ms Viviers says: Studies have shown mixed results for the aphrodisiac effects of ginkgo biloba. In one study, both male and female participants claimed effects such as increased libido after consuming 60mg to 120mg of the supplement daily. The effects appeared to be more noticeable in females. However, other studies noted no improvements. Ginkgo biloba may act as a blood thinner – it is important to check with your doctor before taking blood-thinning medications."



AVOCADO

The Aztecs named the avocado tree "ahuacatl", or testicle tree, as the fruits often hang in pairs. It is associated with sexuality because of its appearance and said to be high in folic acid and vitamins.

Verdict: I've never associated avocado as a virility booster but more as an ingredient for toast and smoothies. For this experiment, I ate the creamy flesh on its own and also had it as a smoothie. But I'm still not convinced about its aphrodisiac effect.

A South China Morning Post article quotes nutritionist Michelle Lau, founder of Hong Kong nutrition consultancy company Nutrilicious, as saying that avocados contain carotenoids, potassium, vitamins B6 and E, which "may potentially heighten the state of arousal and the intensity of orgasm".

Avocados are also high in minerals and low in saturated fat.



MACA

Verdict: I was very curious to try maca – a root vegetable grown in the Andes region that is known as the Peruvian ginseng. There are maca tablets available, but I tried Nature's Superfoods Organic Gelatinized Maca Powder (\$10.90 for a 150g packet from Redmart) so that I could taste its flavour. According to the package information, the "gelatinized maca" refers to the maca roots that are pre-cooked through a gelatinisation process, which breaks down starch chains in the roots and makes the nutrients easier to digest and be absorbed by the body. Maca has a nutty and slightly herbal flavour, so it goes best with cocoa, coffee or nut milks. You can mix half or one teaspoon of the powder into smoothies, cereal, shakes and other beverages, or use it for cakes or cookies. For the past two weeks, I've been adding a teaspoon of it into my coffee, but I don't feel aroused. Perhaps I need to do this over a longer period of time.

Ms Viviers says: "Maca is one of the few popular natural aphrodisiacs backed by scientific research. It has been shown to increase libido in mice and rats, and four studies have shown the same effect on humans too. However, more studies are required to establish safe doses and possible long-term effects."



Top 5: Most romantic places for Valentine’s Day meals

Hot spots for hot dates

Whether you are cooking or splurging on your Valentine’s Day meal, you can enjoy it amid romantic surrounds



Wong Ah Yoke
Senior Food Correspondent

1

THE SUMMERHOUSE
3 Park Lane, tel: 6262-1063

The moment I first laid eyes on the Garden Domes at The Summerhouse last year, I imagined they would be perfect for a romantic Valentine’s Day dinner.

The three transparent domes installed in the herb garden of the Western restaurant in Seletar can each hold a table of eight, but will be reserved for couples on Feb 14. Lovely table settings with floral arrangements will add to the mood.

Go before sunset to see the surroundings’ transformation into dusk and night. When the fairy lights outside the domes come on after dark, the effect is magical.

The domes are air-controlled and have piped-in music, so while you feel like you are in a garden, you also enjoy the comforts of a restaurant.

The five-course dinner is priced at \$550 a couple, with dishes such as seared Hokkaido scallop and pan-seared foie gras with caviar and Iberico crumb, and wood-fired Tajima wagyu oyster blade.

What is worth more is that you will be alone with your loved one during most of the evening, instead of sharing a room with dozens of others.



2

CORNER HOUSE
1 Cluny Road, EJIH Corner House, Singapore Botanic Gardens, tel: 6469-1000

I think this restaurant is lovelier in the day because of the views of the verdant Singapore Botanic Gardens from the air-conditioned balcony.

At night, however, the building – named after Mr Edred John Henry Corner, who was assistant director of the gardens from 1929 to 1945 – takes on a sexier ambience, with the trees outside lit up romantically.

So it works for couples either way, depending on your mood and disposition.

For lunch, see if you can get the table at the end of the balcony, which is the most private corner.

I have always enjoyed good service at the fine-dining modern European restaurant and the cooking of Singapore chef Jason Tan is creative and exquisite.

For Valentine’s Day, there is a four-course lunch menu at \$168 a person and a seven-course dinner menu at \$328 a person.

Dishes include Patagonian toothfish with sea urchin, celeriac lemon and black truffle, and wagyu with butternut squash, cucumber and Singapore black pepper.



3

TANGERINE
Espa level 1, Resorts World Sentosa, 18 Sentosa Gateway, tel: 6577-6336

This must be one of the most overlooked restaurants in Singapore. There were times when I was the only table there for lunch. And many people apparently do not even know of the place.

Still, it is one of the loveliest restaurants here, set inside the landscaped garden of the spa at Resorts World Sentosa. Through the glass walls of the restaurant, you see a pond lined with green plants and a herb garden next to the dining room.

The menu is by Thai celebrity chef Ian Kittichai, with light and delicious dishes that are inspired by Thai cooking, but reworked with a modern Western interpretation.

The five-course dinner for Valentine’s (\$248 for two persons) includes dishes such as Hor Mok Ma Prow Oon (steamed mixed seafood red curry in coconut shell and galangal sauce) and Kee Mao (capellini with beef short ribs in Thai liquor, green peppercorn, sweet basil, garlic and chili).



4

CABLE CAR SKY DINING
Mount Faber, tel: 6377-9688

This offers a novel experience and an evening with little interruption, so except for the stunning views of the southern part of Singapore, you and your partner will have each other’s undivided attention.

Just check with your partner beforehand that he or she is neither claustrophobic nor suffers from a fear of heights. That is because you will be in a cable-car cabin almost the entire night and the only chance to leave early is when the car reaches a station along the route, where your next course is served.

The evening begins with a session of make-it-yourself mojitos and pressed flower bookmarks at the Mount Faber station. Then you enjoy a glass of sparkling wine before boarding the cable car anytime from 5 to 8.30pm. I suggest boarding while there is still light, so you can take in the view through sunset to nightfall during the 90-minute dinner, as the car travels between Mount Faber and Sentosa.

The four-course set menu (\$328 for two persons) includes dishes such as veloute of root vegetables with sea scallops and a choice of Provencal beef steak or tandoori barramundi fillet for the main course. There is also a vegetarian menu.

This dinner is more about the experience. The food is decent, but not likely to win awards. It is fun, though, to see how quickly the staff can clear dishes and serve the next course – with the cable car moving all the time.



5

East Coast Park or Gardens by the Bay

Valentine’s Day dates need not be expensive affairs to feel romantic and special. A dose of imagination might work magic too.

Pack a simple dinner and find an empty bench facing the beach at East Coast Park (above). Food that can be eaten without utensils, such as fried chicken or pizza, works best as you do not want to lug around a basket of knives and forks in the dark. Pack wet wipes though.

If you worry about mosquitoes, some citronella or lemon eucalyptus oil may help keep them away, while smelling nice and being safe around food.

If you need romantic lighting, use battery-operated candles. Daiso has nice-looking ones with flickering bulbs for \$2 each. Otherwise, rely on the cool breezes and, hopefully, a starry sky to light up the fires of passion.

Your partner should appreciate that you are giving him or her all your attention. And you can spend the whole night talking without being interrupted by dishes arriving.

Another good area is at Gardens by the Bay. Look for a spot by the water with a view of the lake and bay, their waters shimmering with lights reflected from Marina Bay Sands.

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PHOTOS: CORNER HOUSE, MOUNT FABER GROUP, RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA, THE NEW PAPER FILE, WONG AH YOE